

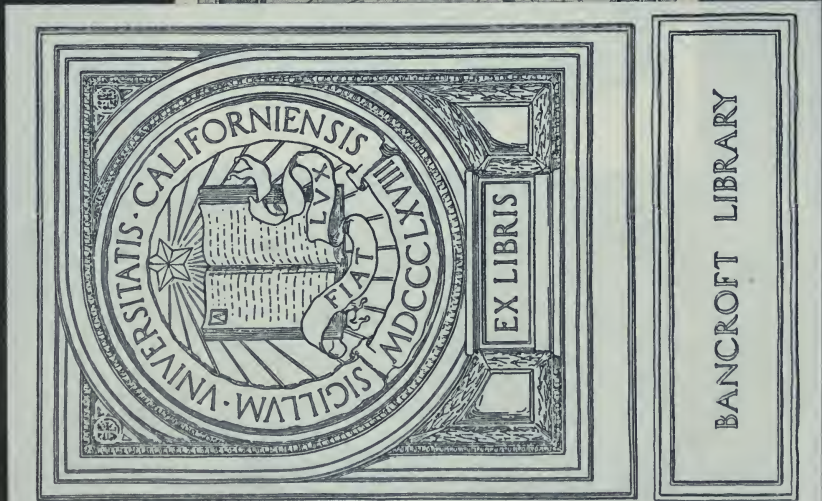
IN TEXAS

with

DAVY CROCKETT



By EVERETT McNEIL

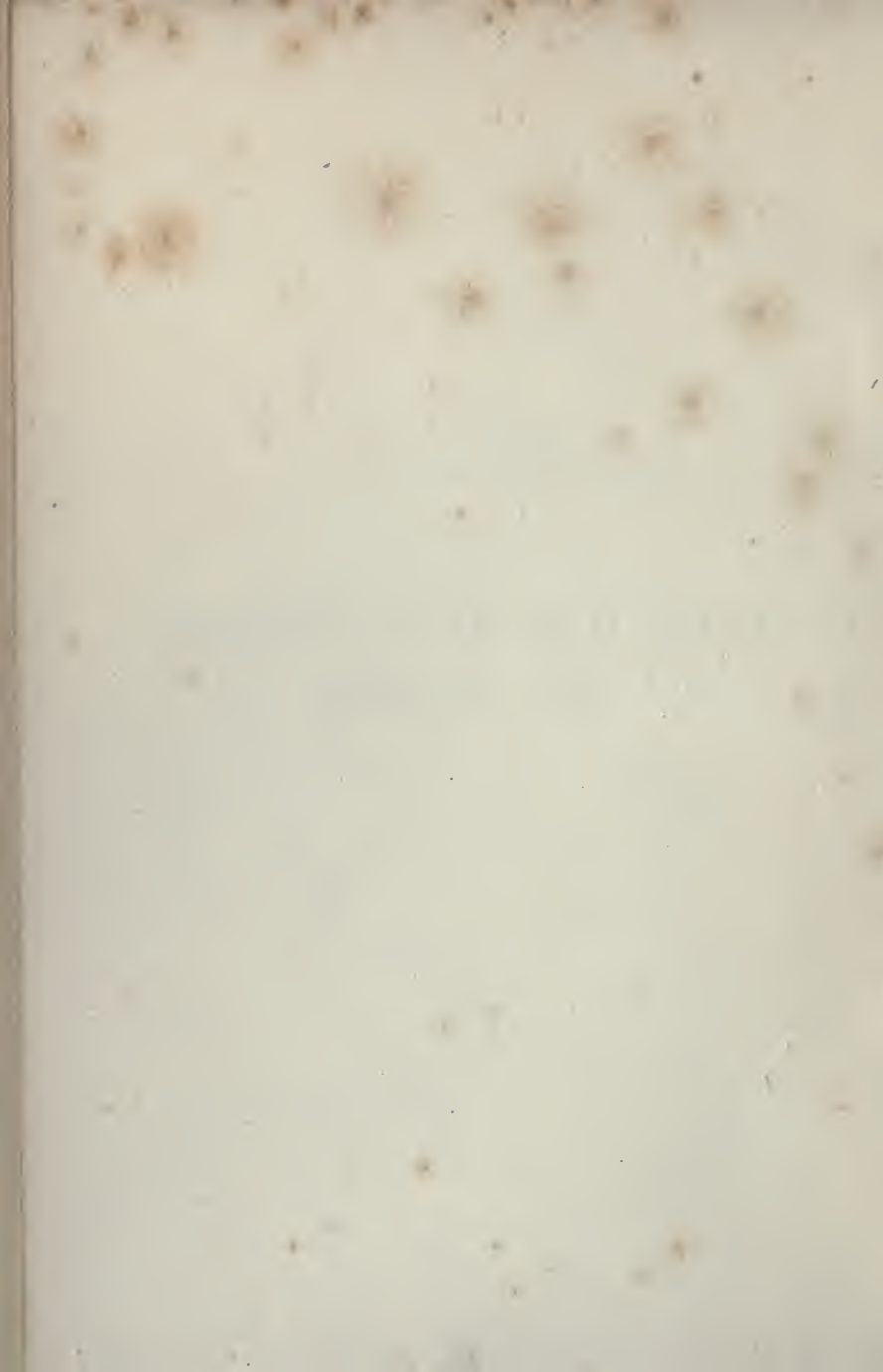


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George Catlin

**In Texas With Davy Crockett
and Sam Houston**





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“Remember the Alamo! Remember Goljād!”

IN TEXAS WITH DAVY CROCKETT

A STORY OF THE
TEXAS WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

BY

EVERETT McNEIL, 1862-

AUTHOR OF "THE HERMIT OF THE CULEBRA MOUNTAINS,"
"THE LOST TREASURE CAVE," "THE BOY
FORTY-NINERS," ETC.



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TO THE YOUTHS,
WHO WISH TO KNOW ON WHAT FOUNDATIONS AMERICA'S
GREATNESS IS BUILT,
THIS STORY OF HOW A MOST IMPORTANT STONE
IN THAT FOUNDATION WAS LAID IS
ADMIRINGLY DEDICATED



FOREWORD

Texas is now one of the greatest states of a great nation; but, at the date when our story begins, the larger part of its vast territory was almost an unbroken wilderness, where the Indians and the wild animals roamed as freely as they did when Columbus discovered America. A few hunters and trappers, little more civilized than the savages themselves, and now and then an American or a Mexican drover, who chased and captured for the Louisiana and the San Antonio markets the wild mustang ponies that roamed in great numbers over these vast solitudes, alone of white men traversed this wild region; and in all that immensity of prairie and forest and mountain and valley there was not then a permanent white habitation.

The settled parts of the country formed a very small portion of its territory. In the interior were the small towns of San Antonio, Gonzales, Goliad, and a few others, dating from the time of the early Spanish colonization or the missions of the Franciscan friars. Along the coast Galveston, Brazoria, Velasco, Copano and two or three other small towns afforded sea communication and landing places for the vessels bringing supplies and settlers

and carrying away the produce of the country. A number of agricultural colonies had been founded under grants of land by the Mexican government to *empresarios* or contractors, notably those of Austin, De Witt, De Leon and the Irish colony of McMullin and McGloire, and these had been occupied with varying degrees of success and permanency. Altogether there was probably something like 25,000 whites then living in Texas, many of whom had come from the United States to settle in one of the agricultural colonies, principally in that of Austin.

For a number of years trouble had been brewing between these colonies and the Mexican government, which the recent despotic actions of Santa Anna, then president in name but in reality dictator of Mexico, had caused to suddenly boil over into open rebellion and had aroused the Anglo-American manhood to the point of armed resistance. Further acts of barbarous cruelty and oppression on the part of the Mexican government had intensified this feeling until the Texan's hatred and contempt for the whole Spanish-Mexican race had become impregnated with a bitterness difficult for us to comprehend at this day, and found expression in words and deeds natural to those ruder times, but now repugnant to our more civilized sensibilities.

In the tale, *In Texas With Davy Crockett and Sam Houston*, an attempt has been made to picture, for the younger generations, as vividly and as correctly as was possible, the closing scenes in this

dramatic conflict between the two opposing races that met in Texas—possibly the most heroic period in the achievements of personal prowess and valor in the history of America; and, of necessity, since the tale is written from the viewpoint of the Anglo-Americans then living in Texas, something of the bitterness and the contempt felt by the Texans for the Mexicans has found expression through the characters in the story. They would not have been true to life had they been otherwise. But the younger readers are cautioned to remember, when considering the parts played by Santa Anna and the other Mexicans in the story, that the Mexico of 1836 and the Mexico of to-day differ almost as day differs from night, that Porfirio Diaz, the president of regenerated Mexico and one of the greatest men America has produced, no more could have committed or sanctioned the crimes and cruelties committed or sanctioned by Santa Anna, one of the greatest scoundrels that ever won high position in any country, than our own revered Washington or Lincoln could have committed or sanctioned similar crimes and cruelties. Mexico to-day is a great nation, and has been wisely governed for many years by a great man.

The characters of Sam Houston and Davy Crockett are unique in history. In all time and in all the world there has been but one Sam Houston, but one Davy Crockett. They were the products of environments that can never be repeated. In

the present tale the characters of these two remarkable men have been as correctly portrayed as a careful study of their biographies and the history of the period and the abilities of the author would permit; and it is hoped that their sturdy honesty and sincerity, their undaunted patriotism and heroic devotion to what they thought to be the right will appeal with inspiring force to all boy readers, and help them to understand that these are the really worthy qualities in all great characters.

But, after all, fiction can never take the place of history and biography, and the author most earnestly suggests that his young readers supplement the reading of *In Texas With Davy Crockett and Sam Houston* by perusing a good history of Texas and the biographies of Sam Houston and Davy Crockett in order to get a clearer idea than it was possible to give in the tale itself of the historical settings of the story and a better knowledge of the lives of its two leading historical characters, and to acquire something like a right understanding of one of the most important epochs in the wonderful growth of America, the epoch that gave to the United States and to its civilization the vast domain of what is now the great State of Texas.

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W. & R. CHAMBERS, LIMITED, LONDON AND EDINBURGH.

In Texas With Davy Crockett and Sam Houston

CHAPTER I

THE WOUNDED PANTHER

IN 1836 the canebrakes of Texas had not yet felt the sharp pruning-knife of civilization and grew in the rankest profusion along the low-lying alluvial banks of its southeastern streams of water. The tall slender canes, the kind boys use as fishing-poles, stood twenty-five and more feet high and so close together that the wandering white man or Indian was obliged to cut his way through them with his knife, unless he was fortunate enough to find a runway made by the deers and bears and other large wild beasts in their daily journeyings to and from water. Above these narrow passageways, which were usually not more than three or four feet wide, the long thin stems of the canes, having no support where the path had been worn or cut away, drooped a little inward from each side, and, meeting at the top, formed a beautiful and curious canopy, beneath which man and beast might walk effectually shielded from the hot rays of the Texan sun.

On the afternoon of a warm day in January,

1836, from out the opening of such a passageway running through a heavy canebrake that covered the narrow valley of one of the small streams of water which flow into the lower Brazos in southeastern Texas, a large panther suddenly leaped, and ran swiftly towards the woods crowning the low ridge of hills that separated the valley from the higher ground beyond. The panther was evidently wounded and fleeing from enemies; for a blotch of red showed on one side of his tawny coat, and, as he ran, he turned his head frequently to glance backward, as if fearful of pursuit. At the edge of the woods he paused to lick the wound; but, at the sound of the baying of hounds coming from the depths of the canebrake, he lifted his head from the wound, glared angrily in the direction of the sound, and, with an ugly snarl, bounded into the woods and vanished.

The baying of the hounds came swiftly nearer and nearer; and, not three minutes after the panther had disappeared in the woods, a large grayish-yellow dog, followed by two others, rushed out from the arched opening in the canebrake, and, racing furiously up the hill, disappeared in the woods at the spot where the wounded panther had vanished.

Five minutes later two boys, carrying long rifles and stooping slightly as they ran, dashed out of the opening in the canebrake and hurried up the hill, their eyes glancing swiftly to the front and about

them as they came out of the cane, and then falling quickly to the trail of the panther and the dogs at their feet. When they reached the little clot of blood in the edge of the woods, that had fallen where the panther had paused to lick his wound, both boys stopped, and, bending closely to the ground, examined the blood carefully.

“He’s hard hit, Tom!” cried the larger of the two boys exultantly, as he straightened up from the ground. “Bing and the other dogs will sure tree him inside of a couple of miles— There,” and he started excitedly, as a distant burst of yelps and barks from the dogs reached his ears, “they’ve got him now! That’s Bing’s voice yelling ‘Treed! Treed!’ as plainly as if he were talking United States. Come on! We’ve got the vermint this time sure!” and, gripping his rifle tightly, the excited boy sprang away into the woods, followed by his equally excited companion.

For a mile the two boys ran in the direction of the barking dogs, as swiftly as their legs could take them through the underbrush and over the logs of fallen trees that obstructed their way; then, as the sounds coming from the dogs warned them that they were nearing the spot where the panther had been brought to bay, they stopped running and began a more cautious advance.

“I—I want the first shot, Trav,” panted the younger of the two boys, pushing himself to the front, as they crept, silent as two Indians, through

the underbrush that here grew so thickly that it prevented their seeing only a few yards ahead. "I want to revenge Whiteface, my own little red heifer that the old scoundrel killed night before last. I brought her up by hand, and she would follow me around like a dog. I want to be the one to kill the brute that killed her. I want the first shot, Trav," and his lips closed firmly, while the glint in his dark eyes deepened.

"All right," answered Travis. "But be mighty careful to kill the critter. A wounded painter's worse than a barrellful of bobcats, and this one's specially big and ugly— Careful, Tom! There's the dogs!" and he caught hold of his comrade's arm and pointed with his rifle barrel through an opening in the underbrush to where the three dogs could be seen jumping up and down excitedly and barking furiously underneath a huge cottonwood tree a hundred yards away.

For two or three minutes the boys' eyes searched the tree in vain for the panther. Then they saw the ferocious beast lying along a large branch of the cottonwood, close to the trunk, his eyes glaring down at the barking dogs beneath him, his ears lying flat against his head, his hair bristling along his back, and his tail thumping the limb of the tree.

"My, but he looks ugly, don't he?" whispered Travis. "We'd better get as close as we can before you shoot. 'Twon't do to risk a long shot on that beast, and I'll stand ready to give him another ball,

if yours don't finish him. Hope he won't kill any of the dogs. He's glaring down on them now as if he wanted to jump."

"My ball will kill him, if it is as full of mad as I am," Tom answered vindictively, as he cocked his rifle and poured a little fresh priming into the pan. "Every time I think of Whiteface I feel like shooting every painter in North America. The brute must have torn her terribly before he killed her. Poor Whiteface! Well, you old sinner, you will never kill another cow, if I can get a ball into you!" and, holding his rifle ready for instant use and keeping an eye on the panther, Tom began slowly and with the utmost caution working his way through the brush toward the animal crouching on the limb of the cottonwood. Travis followed close behind him, making as little noise as possible; for both were fearful that, should the panther see them, he would leap down from the tree and make off before they could get a shot at him.

Both boys had been born almost with a rifle in their hands, and had lived all their lives surrounded by the savage men and beasts of the wilderness, and thought little of running down a bear or panther and shooting him. They knew that men were sometimes killed by bears and panthers when wounded or cornered; but that was to be expected, and was accepted as a part of the dangers all must risk in the rough life they were living; and they did not think of their present peril, as they crept

cautiously toward the panther, as being anything out of the ordinary course of their lives.

The panther was too busy watching and listening to the dogs to notice the approach of the boys, until they were almost under the tree. Then, as a dry twig snapped beneath the foot of one of them, he suddenly lifted his head, caught sight of the two lads, and, with a savage snarl, crouched closer to the limb and began switching his tail violently, a sure sign that his rage was getting the better of his discretion and that he might be expected to spring at any moment.

Tom instantly threw his rifle to his shoulder, and, taking a quick aim at the tawny side just behind the fore-shoulder, he pulled the trigger.

Almost at the instant the report sounded the panther leaped straight toward the two boys. The distance was too great for him to reach them in one spring, and, before he could make the second jump, the dogs were upon him.

Travis, in the intense excitement of the moment, had fired, vainly and foolishly, while the ferocious beast was in the air; and now both boys stood with empty rifles in their hands. weaponless, save for the sharp hunting-knives in their belts and the heavy barrels of their rifles, which might be used as clubs in an encounter at close quarters. But neither lad thought of running. Indeed, running would have been the most dangerous thing they could have done; for the panther could have caught

them, if he wished, in a few bounds, and their backs would have been defenseless. No one can fight with his back to his foe. We can only defend ourselves when we are facing the enemy.

For a minute there was a mad whirl of snarling panther and growling, yelping dogs; and then, with bloodshot eyes and bared fangs, the panther leaped free of the dogs, leaving one of them lifeless and the other two with all the fight whipped out of them for the moment, and crouched, not ten yards from where the two boys stood, with hunting-knives in their right hands, ready to meet the spring of the ugly beast. Nor did they have long to wait, for, with a scream of fury, the panther rose suddenly into the air. But the distance was still too great, and the great brute struck the ground ten feet in front of the boys. Again he crouched, and for a brief instant lay motionless, his furious eyes glaring up into the faces of the boys; and in that fateful instant of quietude, there came the sharp crack of a rifle from immediately behind Tom and Travis; and, without a sound, the panther leaped straight up into the air, and fell dead at their feet, a rifle ball through his brain.

CHAPTER II

THE TALL MAN IN THE COONSKIN CAP

“WISH I may be shot, if this ain’t Trav McNelly! Well, I’m mighty glad to see you, boy,” and a tall, large-boned muscular man, dressed in deerskin and homespun, and wearing a coon-skin cap with the tail hanging down behind, and carrying a splendid long-barreled rifle, caught hold of the astonished boy’s hand and shook it heartily. “Well, well, I’m ’bout as surprised as the fellow was when he met his mother-in-law in heaven, and a mighty sight more pleased. Say, but you have growed like a young steer,” and the shrewd eyes surveyed the tall, well-built, muscular youth with evident approval. “Why, I took you for a full growed man at first, hope I may be shot if I didn’t.”

“And I was never more pleased to see anyone in my life than I was to see you,” and Travis glanced significantly toward the dead panther, while his whole face shone with the surprise and pleasure the sudden appearance of the tall stranger had given him. “You needed but one shot to kill the brute, Davy!”

"I reckon Betsey did do the business for that painter in one crack. Betsey don't usually have to speak twice," and the eyes of the stranger rested admiringly on his long-barreled rifle, while he kicked the limp body of the dead panther contemptuously. "But, in the name of all that's wonderful, what are you doing down here? The last I knowed of you, you was scratching for a living among the bears and coons of Tennessee."

"Why, dad moved down here more'n a year ago. You see— Oh, I forgot that you don't know my friend," and Travis turned to Tom. "This is Tom Gifford, our nearest neighbor's boy, and the best chum a boy ever had. His folks moved 'long with my folks from Tennessee. And this," and the boy's face lighted with pride and pleasure, as his eyes turned to the tall stranger in the coonskin cap. "This, Tom, is Davy Crockett, Colonel Davy Crockett of Tennessee, the greatest bear-hunter in the United States."

"Cut the handle out, Trav," laughed Crockett, for our tall friend was none other than that famous backwoodsman bear-hunter and statesman, as he grasped Tom Gifford's hand. "Plain Davy Crockett is good enough for me, though I don't mind that bear-hunter attachment, for I reckon I have killed more bears for my weight and age than any other man in the United States. Well, I'm mighty glad to know you, Tom. Any fellow that Trav McNelly calls his chum can count on Davy

Crockett as long as there's a grain of powder left in his horn or a coonskin on a coon," and a genial smile lighted his sun-bronzed face.

Tom's eyes had grown big and wide with admiring wonder, when he learned who his chum's tall friend was; for, at that time, the name and fame of Davy Crockett, bear-hunter and ex-congressman, rough backwoodsman though he was, was known to nearly every boy in the United States, and was the especial glory of all Tennessee boys, and Tom still considered himself a Tennessee boy, although now living in Texas, then a part of Mexico. And now this hero, magnified by a boy's vivid imagination and the oft-sung praises of his chum, was standing before him, was actually shaking his hand! The glory and honor of it all was almost too much for Tom's composure; and he flushed and stammered, but he made up abundantly in the warmth of his handshake and the look of pleasure on his face what his words lacked in their welcome to the great bear-hunter.

"You will go home with me, won't you?" and Travis looked eagerly into Colonel Crockett's face. "Father and mother and the rest will be powerful glad to see you. Dad was saying only last night that he wished Davy Crockett was here to help us lick Mexico. You will come home with me, won't you, Davy? Father and mother and Kitty will be tickled 'most to death to see you. We live only about a couple of miles from here."

“Go home with you? Well, I reckon I will, and be mighty glad of the chance. I don’t know anybody I’d rather see just now than Sam McNelly, and Mother Jane, and Kitty-Cat—pretty little Kitty-Cat,” and the colonel’s face softened. “She was about the prettiest bit of baby-girl flesh and blood I ever saw, and as pert and quick as a humming-bird. But, I reckon she’s ’most a young lady now and like as not forgot her old sweetheart, Crockett. Great bobcats, how she used to pull my hair!” and he laughed loudly. “Hope she’s got her pull under better regulation now.”

“I don’t know about her pull being under better regulation,” and Travis smiled, as he thought of the jerk her quick fingers had given his hair only that morning, when his brotherly teasing had passed beyond the limits of her sisterly patience; “but I do know Kitty hasn’t forgotten Davy Crockett, and that she’ll be powerful glad to see you.”

“And I’ll be mighty glad to see her, and Sam and Mother Jane,” Crockett responded. “Why, it’s like a dead-hungry man coming sudden and unexpected upon a roasting hunk of venison, my finding you folks here, when I’m nigh about starving for the sight of a friend’s face. Seems like I’ve been away from Tennessee for years. But, let’s get the hide off that critter in a hustle. My fist is fairly aching for the feel of Sam McNelly’s handshake. Sam was always powerful on the shake,” and,

drawing his hunting-knife from its sheath, his skillful hands soon had the skin off the panther.

In the meantime Tom and Travis examined the dogs. The panther had killed one; but Bing, a large grayish-yellow mongrel hound, and the other dog, fortunately had escaped with only a few scratches. Bing was the personal property of Travis and a famous hunting dog, consequently the lad's joy over his escape from serious hurt tempered his sorrow over the loss of the other. The two boys quickly scooped out a shallow grave with their hunting-knives, buried the dead dog; and then Travis, throwing the heavy skin of the panther over his shoulder, proudly led the way home. It was not every day that a boy could bring home the hide of a panther and a famous guest like Colonel Davy Crockett, and, consequently, he was greatly elated over his present good fortune.

The way to the house ran through the canebrake, across a small creek, and up the wooded ridge on the opposite side to a little opening in the woods, on the edge of a prairie of many hundreds of acres in extent. Here stood the humble log cabin of Samuel McNelly; and a couple of miles to the eastward, crowning a small hill, was the equally humble home of his nearest neighbor, Jonas Gifford, the father of Tom. A small log barn, with a rail fence enclosing an acre or so of land for a pig pasture behind it, were the only other signs that man had here begun his conquest of the wilderness.

When Travis, with his two companions, came within hailing distance of the little cabin, he placed both hands to his mouth and uttered a series of loud halloos; and, almost instantly in response to the call, the door of the cabin was thrown open, and a young girl, tall and slender and as graceful as a deer, bounded out, and, with uncovered head and hair flying out behind like a silken banner, raced toward them.

“Did you get the painter? Did you kill the painter?” she cried, as she ran; and, when for an answer, Travis swung the panther’s skin around his head, she gave a glad shout of triumph, and in a minute more was standing, panting and with flushed cheeks, by his side, staring, abashed and frightened, for strangers came rarely to her humble home, into the face of the tall man in the coonskin cap, who had just stepped out from behind Tom. But in a moment her face lighted. “Why—why, it’s Davy Crockett!” and, with a rush, her arms were around his neck.

“Scratching wildcats, and is this my little Kitty-Cat, this big handsome girl?” and he held her off at arm’s length, while he looked into her flushed, excited face. “And you knowed me, knowed me right off,” he repeated delightedly. “And you was but a little mite of a thing, ’bout chin high to a hop-toad, when you kissed me good-by way back in Tennessee, nigh on to five years ago; and now, why I wouldn’t have knowed you at all, if it wasn’t for

that pretty little dimple in that pretty little cheek that looks so sweet that I sure must—" But here the excited girl broke from his arms.

"I must tell dad and mother!" she cried. "I must tell dad and mother that Davy Crockett, Davy Crockett from Tennessee, has come! They'll be powerful surprised and pleased," and she whirled about and ran at full speed back to the house.

A moment after she disappeared in the cabin, a great giant of a man, followed by a woman, rushed out of the door, and both shouted joyous greetings to Colonel Crockett; and, when he came close enough, gripped him by the hand and made him welcome with a whole-hearted hospitality that left no doubt of the genuineness of his welcome. This was Samuel McNelly and his wife, Mother Jane, as Crockett called her, the father and mother of Travis and Katherine, or Kitty, as she was better known.

"Now, come right in and sit down to the table," Mrs. McNelly insisted, as soon as the greetings were over. "We had just set down to supper when we heard Trav's halloo. 'Twon't take me a minute to get things ready. Come right in," and she threw the door hospitably open.

The house into which our good friends, thus cordially urged, entered was extremely rude and primitive in its architecture and furnishing; and, as a type of the homes of the hardy pioneers who made possible the building of our great nation—

homes deserving of our most affectionate remembrances, because of the great and sturdy men they nurtured—it is worthy of the sympathetic interest of every boy and girl who would know how those strong-hearted men and women and children, who hewed the nation out of the wilderness, lived.

The walls of the cabin, house is almost too dignified a name for such a primitive structure, were about ten feet high and built out of the straight trunks of trees, which Sam McNelly had felled in the nearby woods, cut into logs of the right length, and laid, one on top of another, around a space twenty feet by thirty feet, already marked out and smoothed down for the house-site. The logs were held in place by notches cut in their ends, in such a way that the end of one log fitted into the end of another log at the four corners of the cabin. The roof was supported by rafters cut from smaller trees, and rendered water-tight by a rude covering of rough shingles, made by splitting straight-grained logs about four feet long. An opening three feet wide and seven feet high, cut or sawed through the logs on one side, formed the door, which was firmly secured by upright pieces of timber pinned to the ends of the logs, and very strongly made. A large fireplace, built of stone, nearly filled the side of one end of the cabin. The chimney was outside, and made of small logs of wood lined with mud or clay. A couple of openings two feet square answered for windows, while a series of

loopholes, running around the walls about six feet above the floor, showed that the cabin could be quickly transformed into a fort, if there were need to repel an Indian attack. A rough floor laboriously made by hewing boards out of the trunks of trees with an axe, protected the feet from the cold and the damp of the ground.

The furnishings of the little home were equally rude and primitive. The halves of a split log firmly fastened together side by side, split side up, and supported by sticks driven into auger holes, formed a rude but exceedingly strong and durable table. Three-legged stools and short chunks of logs answered for chairs. Wooden pins, driven into holes bored in the logs, supported shelves on each side of the fireplace, where Mrs. McNelly kept her few valued dishes and cooking utensils. Other pins performed the duties of clothes-hooks, and held various odds and ends belonging to the household. There were no china dishes; but wooden plates, horn spoons, gourd cups and dippers, and a few pewter and iron articles supplied their simple needs.

A curtain, made of homespun cloth, hung across one end of the room, and partitioned off a small bedroom, sacred to the use of Kitty. The beds themselves were rude homemade affairs, but rendered soft and warm by the skins and furs of the wild animals shot by Trav and his father. In one corner of the large room stood the spinning-wheel and

loom on which Mrs. McNelly and Kitty spun and wove all the yarn and cloth used for any purpose. Indeed, in this humble pioneer home there was scarcely an article, whether for use or adornment, that was not fashioned by the hands of some one of the household.

No wonder this manner of life bred independent, fearless, resourceful men and women, for, from early childhood, they were brought up to depend almost entirely on their own exertions for every necessity and comfort they possessed. A rifle and an axe, a spinning-wheel and a loom were all that any man and woman needed to begin and maintain a home. The axe built and furnished the house, the rifle provisioned and defended it, and the spinning-wheel and the loom clothed its inmates. Some day someone will write the epic of the American rifle and sing the song of the axe and the spinning-wheel and the loom.

Such was the rude dwelling-place of Samuel McNelly; but, as President Garfield once said, a log in the woods with Mark Hopkins on one end and a student on the other had all the essential elements of a college, so the rudest of log cabins, with Jane McNelly, Mother Jane, in it, was a home in all the blessed essentials dear to husband and children and guests.

The moment Davy Crockett and the two boys were in the house, Mrs. McNelly pushed three more of the rude chairs up to the table, placed wooden

plates and iron knives and forks in front of them, and moved a great platter of roasted bear-meat within convenient reach of the three chairs.

"There, just sit right down and help yourselves to the meat," and Mother Jane motioned hospitably to the three chairs. "I'll have some hot johnny-cake and honey ready for you in a jiffy. I remember, Davy, that you are powerful fond of hot johnny-cake and honey with plenty of butter," and she hurried to the glowing fireplace.

"That's where your memory strikes the center of the bull's-eye," Crockett laughed in his big jovial voice, as he seated himself in one of the chairs. "Just the mention of it has set my mouth to watering like a spring freshet. Well," and he glanced to where Sam McNelly had seated himself at the other side of the table, "it seems mighty good, Sam, to see your big mouth grinning at me again across the table. But, who'd thought of finding Sam McNelly down here among the alligators and canebrakes of Texas?"

"'Tain't as queer as it is to find Colonel Congressman Davy Crockett a-wandering around among them same alligators and canebrakes," the big mouth grinned back. "Didn't suppose a forty-horse mule team could pull you away from your Tennessee constituents," and the clear blue eyes of the big pioneer searched the face of his guest shrewdly.

"My Tennessee constituents!" and, for a moment,

a shadow darkened Crockett's smiling face and his eyes lighted indignantly. "They wanted to lock a Jackson collar around my neck and label it 'Andrew Jackson, his dog'; but I told them that I would go back to Washington unlabeled and with no man's collar around my neck, or I wouldn't go back at all; that I was willing to go with General Jackson in everything that I believed was honest and right, but, further than that, I wouldn't go for him or any other man in the whole creation; that I would a mighty sight sooner be honestly and politically dead, than hypocritically immortalized; and, well, when election was over, I discovered that they did not want me without the collar, so I told them they might go to Halifax and I would go to Texas; and here I am," and the smiling good-humor came back into his face.

"Bully for you, Davy!" and the big fist of the giant came down on the table with a bang that made the plates jump. "'Be sure you are right, then go ahead,' that's Davy Crockett every time. Well, I reckon if Tennessee can't use men like you, Davy, Texas can, and be mighty glad of the chance. You've come just in time to help us lick Santa Anna and his Mexicans out of their boots; and we'll do it, too," and his eyes lighted and his face hardened. "Think, Davy, that despot, Santa Anna, has ordered us to give up our rifles, our rifles!" he repeated, his eyes flashing angrily. "And to Greasers! How could we get meat for our wives and

children, if we had no rifles to shoot it? How could we defend ourselves and families from the wild beasts, and the Indians, and the cut-throats, white and black, without rifles? Give up our rifles! Let the Mexicans come and try to take them, and we will show them what brave men will do when ordered to give up their only means of defending themselves and families in this wild, lawless country," and down again came the great fist on the table with a force that made the plates jump a foot in the air.

By all of which it may be seen how thoroughly the recent decree of Santa Anna reducing the militia in Texas to one for every five hundred inhabitants, and ordering all others to surrender their arms, had aroused the Texans; for, as Sam McNelly thought, so thought all Texans. Indeed, had it been possible to have enforced this cruel decree, it would have left all Texas virtually at the mercy of marauding Indians and white desperadoes, and robbed many a family of its daily means of existence. But, not all Mexico could have enforced that order, except over the dead body of Texas. Give up his rifle! You might as well have ordered a Texan of that period to give up his life.

"Thundering Sinai!" and Crockett's face hardened and his eyes flashed and turned involuntarily to where his beloved Betsey stood in a corner of the cabin. "Give up your rifles, when the woods are full of painters and bears and deer, not to mention

the lesser vermint, and cut-throat Greasers, and red Injuns, and white desperadoes! Well, I reckon, that fool decree didn't work none much this side of the Rio Grande."

"Not a rod, not an inch," Sam McNelly answered grimly. "At Gonzales, a little town on the Guadalupe River, where they have a six-pounder cannon for defense against the Indians, the Greasers got their answer as to what the Texans would do when ordered to give up their arms. The Mexicans demanded the surrender of this cannon. The people of Gonzales refused to give it up. Then a troop of Mexican cavalry, a hundred strong, were ordered to go to Gonzales and get the cannon. But, by this time, the men from the surrounding country had rallied to the town to back their refusal to give up the cannon; and, when the Mexican cavalry reached the west bank of the Guadalupe River opposite the town, they found that all the boats had been removed to the other side of the river, and that a hundred or so rough-looking men, armed with long rifles, seemed mighty anxious for them to try to come over and get the cannon. The Greasers did make one or two attempts to cross the river; but quit mighty sudden when the long rifles began firing at them.

"'Well, now,' grumbled that old Indian fighter, John Moore, when he saw the Mexicans didn't have the pluck to cross the river, 'since the Greasers won't come over to get the cannon, I move that we

take it over to them, loaded with arguments against the confiscatin' of our arms, plumb to the muzzle,' and that night across the river they all went, long rifles, cannon and all.

"The Greasers fired at them; but the good Lord, knowing the nature of the beasts, made Mexicans so they can't shoot straight, and no damage was done. The next morning showed the Greasers on top of a little mound in the prairie, and wanting to parley. But Moore told them to either subscribe to the Liberal Constitution of Texas and join the Texans, or to surrender. Still the Mexicans couldn't see it that way; so the six-pounder loaded with grape discharged its argument, and the Texans, with wild yells, charged up the mound, savage as meat axes; and the Greasers, not being born with a liking for the feel of hot lead and cold steel, legged it back to Bexar as fast as their horses could gallop. I reckon Santa Anna could understand that answer to his decree without its being translated," and the big backwoodsman smiled grimly.

"Certain 'twas writ plain and big enough for him to read without specks," laughed Crockett. "Hi-ho, here comes Hot Johnny!" he shouted the next moment, as Mrs. McNelly placed a steaming-hot plate of johnny-cake down in front of him. "Now, I'll forget Santa Anna and his Greasers and think of Mother Jane and her hot 'johnny-cake. I declare you do smell prime, as the fox said to the gander before he began making the feathers fly,"

and Crockett took a long whiff of the savory corn bread, and then got "down to business," as he called it, in a way that left no doubts in Mrs. McNelly's mind that he was still as fond as ever of hot johnny-cake.

During this time Tom and Trav and Kitty had been exceedingly interested but silent listeners, and their eyes had hardly once left the lively countenance of their jolly guest, whose lips and eyes and whole face talked almost as expressively as did his tongue. In those days, boys and girls had little to say in the presence of their elders, and seldom ventured to speak unless directly spoken to; besides Davy Crockett in their eyes was a very great and famous man, a hero, and, in spite of his free and easy manners, the awe of his greatness tied their tongues; but it did not close their ears.

After supper, the night had already grown dark and Kitty had lighted two tall tallow candles and placed them on the table, the two men pulled their chairs up in front of the fireplace, lighted their pipes, and, for the time being forgetting Texas and her troubles, began to talk of old times and scenes back in Tennessee, while the two boys and Kitty listened with entranced ears, and Mrs. McNelly, as she moved back and forth busy with her evening's work, every now and then added her bit of reminiscence or comment to the talk of the men. Under such interesting circumstances time fled so swiftly that it grew late almost without the boys knowing it; and

it was not until Mrs. McNelly had hinted two or three times that his folks might be worrying about him, that Tom finally arose from the bearskin in front of the fireplace where he and Trav had been reclining, and reluctantly admitted that it was time he was going home.

"Come over as early as you can in the morning, Tom," Trav whispered as he followed Tom to the door. "Maybe we can get Colonel Crockett to go on a bear-hunt with us."

"Tell your pa that Colonel Davy Crockett from Tennessee is here," Sam McNelly called; "and to come over early in the morning, and bring his rifle and dogs. I reckon Colonel Crockett would like to have a try at our Texas bears, aye, Davy?"

"Correct," Crockett responded promptly, his face lighting up. "I haven't had a good out and out bear-hunt for a dog's age; and Betsey is powerful anxious to try conclusions with a Texas bear before tackling Santa Anna and his Greasers. And tell your dad, Tom, I want you to come along, too. You and Trav showed real grit when that painter jumped at you to-day, real bear-hunter grit; and I want you both to go along with us to-morrow. So trot out your biggest bear to-morrow, boys, and let Betsey and I take a squint at him," and Crockett smiled pleasantly at the flushed faces of the two lads, who blushed like schoolgirls with pleasure at this unexpected praise from the great Davy Crockett.

“What did I tell you, Tom? what did I tell you?” Trav exclaimed excitedly, as he stepped out of the door to say good night to his chum. “Oh, it will be great to go bear-hunting with Davy Crockett! And, say, Tom, did you notice his rifle? It looks fit for a king—and he is a king, the king of bear-hunters! That’s the rifle the young men of Philadelphia gave him, for being honest and brave enough to go against even General Jackson when he thought General Jackson was in the wrong. You know Davy’s motto is: ‘Be sure you are right; then go ahead’; and he lives right up to it on the square. Now, be sure and tell your father that Davy Crockett said for you to come, and come early.”

“As if I could forget that!” laughed Tom. “Never fear, I’ll be over in time to pull you out of bed,” and with a laughing good night, Tom started on the run for his home.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT BEAR-HUNT.

THE next morning Trav McNelly was the first one up in the cabin. As he arose to his feet and quickly dressed, he glanced over to the bed in the corner of the cabin, where his father and Davy Crockett had gone to sleep the night before, to assure himself that the wonderful happenings of the day before were not a dream and that Davy Crockett was really there in sound flesh and blood, and saw a pair of exceedingly bright eyes sparkling at him above the bearskin comforters.

“Hello, up already? Well, you didn’t beat me more’n one twist of a coon’s tail,” and the long form of Davy Crockett vaulted out of the bed. “Here, tumble out, Old Lazybones,” and, turning quickly, he caught hold of one arm of his huge bedfellow, and jerked him out on the floor, where he landed with a thud that shook the whole cabin.

“Time to get up, Sam,” and Crockett grinned joyously down into the startled face of Sam McNelly, who had been sound asleep until he struck the floor.

“Land of goodness! What——what was that?”

An earthquake?" and, to the joy of the grinning boy and man, they heard Mrs. McNelly leap out of the bed where she had been sleeping with Kitty, and rush to the curtain separating the two rooms. "Heavens and earth!" she exclaimed, sticking her head through the curtain. "I thought it was an earthquake, and 'twon't only Sam McNelly getting out of bed!"

"Right you are, mother," responded the good-natured backwoodsman, quickly jumping to his feet, and making a swipe with the flat of his great hand at Crockett that would have knocked him off his feet had it hit him, but, like the Scotchman's flea, Davy was not where the hand fell. "'Twas only Davy and me getting out of bed. You see, Davy, being in front, got out first, and I followed kindly sudden, forgetting to use my feet and landing on my back. Now, you and Kitty hustle the breakfast on the table and put up a snatch for us to eat, so that we can get after the bears as soon as possible. I reckon we'd better hunt in the Hurricane Fall; and it's a good ten miles there, so the sooner we get started the better. Bears are getting a little scarce right around here, Davy; but, I reckon, Bing and the other dogs can scare up some of the brutes in the Hurricane Fall, where a great storm tore up about a million trees, and piled them on top of one another, like the devil had been playing jackstraws with them."

"If the Texas bears are of the same breed as the

Tennessee bears, that's where you will find them," Crockett agreed. "Hi-ho, Kitty-Cat," and he turned to Kitty, who had just stepped out from behind the curtain. "The top o' the morning to you. You're looking as fresh and as sweet as a ripe strawberry. Come and give your old sweetheart his morning's kiss. 'Twill take the bad taste of the night out of my mouth, and sweeten it for the whole day." Davy Crockett was of Irish descent, and some of his ancestors must have surely kissed the blarney stone in Blarney Castle, Ireland.

"I will, if you will give me the skin of the biggest bear you kill to-day," replied the little maid, blushing at her boldness and smiling roguishly until the dimples showed in each cheek. "I want it to spread on the floor in front of my bed. Will you give me the bearskin, Davy?"

"That I will; and I reckon I'll get the best and the sweetest end of the bargain, too," and the gallant colonel advanced quickly to the side of the girl, and gave her a rousing smack on each red cheek.

"Oh, but you took two! And the bargain only called for one," cried Kitty, quickly springing away.

"Then, why did you show me two dimples? I'm plaguy certain they both wanted me to kiss them," declared Colonel Crockett grinning. "But, I will bring you two bearskins. Wish I may be shot, if I don't. Now, come and give me another kiss, just to bind the bargain."

But Kitty, with a laughing toss of her head, told

him she had no more time for fooling, and turned away to help her mother with the breakfast, while Davy Crockett went out to the barn, where Trav and his father were attending to the horses and cows, and doing the other necessary chores.

After breakfast, three horses were saddled and bridled; and, just as Trav and his father and their guest were about to mount them, Jonas Gifford and Tom rode up, accompanied by their two hunting dogs; and, without further delay, the start for the Hurricane Fall, where they were to do their bear-hunting, was made.

“Don’t worry, if we’re not back until late, Jane,” Sam McNelly called back to his wife, as they rode away. “Davy hangs to a bear like a wax plaster, and there’s no getting him away until the bear is dead, so it may be after dark before we get home.”

“Don’t you dare to come back without my two bearskins,” Kitty shouted to Davy Crockett. “If you do, you can’t have any supper.”

“Just hold to your apron strings, Kitty-Cat,” Crockett called back to her. “Them bearskins are yourn just as certain as if they were under your pretty feet this very minute; and, if you don’t have the table piled high with hot johnny-cake when we get back, there’ll be a kettleful of trouble, and you’ll be dancing in the middle of it,” and he half turned in his saddle and shook his fist at her.

At the end of an hour’s riding the bear-hunters came to the edge of a great woods, through which a

tornado had mowed a swath a couple of miles wide some three or four years before, leaving the trees broken and tumbled one upon the other, and lying, as Davy Crockett said, "every which and t'other way until it made a feller cross-eyed just to look at them." Here the hunters dismounted and tied their horses to the trunks of fallen trees; for that tremendous jumble of logs and branches was utterly impassable to horses and obliged them to continue the hunt on foot. The dogs, there were six of them, including Trav's Bing, a veteran bear-hunter, now began running hither and thither among the fallen timber, looking for bear; and, in less than half an hour, their loud barking and baying announced that they were on the trail of Bruin.

"There they go!" and Crockett, his eyes beginning to sparkle with the excitement of the hunt, started in the direction of the barking dogs so swiftly that Trav and Tom, who had determined by all means to keep near the great Tennessee bear-hunter, found great difficulty in keeping close to his side. "I knowed we would strike a breeze of luck," he said to the two panting boys, when at the end of a couple miles' run they paused for a short breathing, "because I dreamed last night of having a mighty hard tussle with a big black nigger, and that is a sure sign that I am going to have a fight with a bear. I never knowed such a dream to fail me in a bear country, and—"

"They've treed him! They've treed him!" broke

in Trav excitedly, as a sudden burst of furious barking reached their ears. "Bing never barks like that except when he's treed a bear or a painter. Come on, Davy, hurry, Tom, or dad and Jonas will beat us there and get the first shot. Come on," and again the three raced over and under and through the network of fallen timber as fast as their vigorous muscles could propel them in the direction of the barking dogs. They could hear Sam McNelly crashing through the brush a little to the right of them, and Jonas Gifford to the left; and the boys did not want their fathers to beat them to the dogs, because they wished to see Davy Crockett shoot a bear with his famous rifle all by himself, and the first shot belonged to the one who caught the first sight of the bear. But they had little need to fear on that score, for the giant body of Sam McNelly was ill fitted for rapid locomotion through such a tangle of trees, and the stockily built Jonas Gifford would never win a prize for speed anywhere, while the tall, lithe frame of Crockett seemed made of steel and run by some powerful engine, so swiftly and surely did he make his way through the jumble of trees straight toward the dogs.

Trav and Tom, greatly excited, followed Davy Crockett as best they could; and, by making tremendous efforts, succeeded in keeping within sight of his coonskin cap. At last they heard him give the view-halloo, and a minute later they came to where he stood in the edge of the Hurricane Fall peering

up into a great cottonwood tree, under which Bing and the other dogs were barking furiously.

"I see him! There, about half way up the tree!" cried Trav excitedly, pointing with one hand up into the cottonwood.

"Now, if you'll just wait a minute until the blood stops jumping through your veins so that you can hold your rifle steady, one of you boys can have a try at his royal highness squatting up there alongside the trunk," and Crockett smiled down on the excited faces of the two lads.

"No! No!" they both exclaimed. "We want to see you kill the bear! We want to see Davy Crockett kill a bear! You shoot."

"Such is fame," Crockett laughed. "Well, I don't know but what I agree with you lads, and think it a mighty sight more interesting to shoot a big bear out of a tree and watch him come tumbling down to the ground in the midst of the yelping, growling, barking dogs, than it is to be a congressman and help make the laws of your country. A bear-hunter at least can always talk as he shoots, straight from the shoulder, which a congressman can't do—that is if he wants to stay in congress," he added, smiling whimsically, as he thought of how his own straight talk had brought about his defeat. "Now, when you've got your bear treed, you want to let your blood quit jumping before firing, or, a tin whistle to a cannon, you don't plunk the bear in the bull's-eye, and he comes down out

of the tree ugly-wounded, and like as not kills a couple of dogs for you. Well, I reckon Betsey is powerful obliged to you boys for giving her the first crack at that bear. She's fairly itching to speak her little word, so I'll let her blaze away," and he suddenly threw his long-barreled rifle to his shoulder.

The bear stood in the crotch of a great limb, about twenty feet from the ground, his forepaws half encircling the trunk of the tree, his head turned sideways, and his little round eyes glaring down at Crockett and the two boys, knowing only too well where his greatest danger lay.

"I'll be shot if I don't believe I'll plunk him in the eye," Crockett said, as the long barrel became steady. "It's dead sure death when it hits right." For a brief instant the barrel of the rifle remained absolutely motionless; and then, with a sharp crack, the smoke leaped from the muzzle.

At the report of the rifle the bear's head jerked sharply backward, the body stiffened, and then fell straight downward, dead, into the midst of the yelping dogs.

"Hurrah, you got him the first shot!" shouted Trav, as he and Tom ran to where the dogs were worrying the carcass.

The moment the boys came up, Bing ceased biting at the dead bear, looked up into their faces, and, with a sharp bark, sprang away through the woods, followed by all the other dogs.

"Another bear! There they go after another bear!" shouted Crockett, as he rammed the ball quickly down the throat of Betsey. "There were two bears, and now the dogs are after the other one. Come on, boys. Leave that dead bear for Sam and Jonas," and away he started on the trail of the dogs.

"Here! Here!" Trav shouted to his father, who just now appeared in sight, struggling bravely through the network of fallen trees. "Davy has just killed one bear, and now he is off after another, and we're off after him. Look after the dead bear. He's here under this tree," and, with a shout, away he and Tom went after the coonskin cap of Davy Crockett, which they could see bobbing swiftly in and out among the trees a few rods ahead; but, do their best, they could not gain an inch on it, and presently they lost sight of the cap altogether, and had only the barking of the dogs to guide them.

A few minutes later a change in the clamor of the dogs told them that the bear was treed, and they redoubled their efforts so as to be in at the death; but, before they came within sight of the dogs, they heard Davy's rifle crack, and, when a few minutes later they caught sight of him, he was standing over the body of a dead bear, with the panting dogs lying in a circle around him.

"I've got him!" he shouted, jubilant as a boy, as the two lads hurried up. "I couldn't wait for you

fellows nohow. Betsey was too dead anxious to shoot. I knowed I was going to strike a powerful breeze of luck when I dreamed of that nigger. Never knowed that dream to fail. Mighty good dog that Bing of yourn, Trav. Now, let's butcher the critter; and then I reckon Bing will be ready to smell us out another bear, won't you, you old war-horse?"

Bing thumped his tail emphatically on the ground behind him, then got up and went to the bear, seized him by the throat, and worried it violently for a moment, by way of showing how plainly he understood the colonel's words and how emphatically he approved of them.

In a moment more Davy Crockett and the two boys had their hunting-knives out and were skinning the bear. As soon as the skin was off they cut the body open, and hung it and the skin up in a tree, where they could get them after the hunt was over. Just as they finished hanging up the bear Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford came puffing up. They had skinned and hung up the other bear, and then had started on the run on the trail of the dogs.

"Say, where does Jonas and I come in in this hunt?" laughed Sam McNelly, when he caught sight of this second bear. "We haven't had a sight of a bear yet until he is dead. I reckon we'll have to tie Davy up, Jonas, or we won't get a shot at a bear

to-day. Well, Trav, what do you think now of our great Tennessee bear-hunter? Two bears, and the hunt not an hour old!"

"He's great," Trav, answered, his eyes shining with honest admiration. "And both bears killed by bullets in the eyes!"

"That's just to save making a hole in the hide," laughed Crockett. "And as for you and Jonas," and he turned his beaming countenance to Sam McNelly. "Every turtle to his own mud puddle. I reckon the good Lord never made them legs and bodies of yourn for running bear. Looks to me as if they were built just about right for butchering dead bears and hanging up their bodies, don't they, boys?" and he winked to Trav, and Tom, who stood grinning by his side.

"Sure," responded both boys promptly.

"Well, I reckon that's about all Jonas and I will get a chance of doing to-day," Sam grinned back. "But 'tain't nigh as hard on one's clothes and feelings, as racing lickity-split over logs and stumps and through brambles and brush, just to put a hunk of lead into a bear. So go ahead, Davy, and slaughter all the bear in Texas if you want to, and Jonas and I will 'tend to the butchering."

"Hear that, Bing, you old bear-smeller?" and Crockett turned to the dogs. "We're given cart blank, as they say in Washington when they want a fellow to go ahead and spend a lot of somebody else's cash; so get a hustle on you. Smell them

out! Smell them out! Come on, boys!" and, shouting to the dogs, Davy Crockett again plunged into the tangled mass of the Hurricane Fall.

For half an hour the dogs ran hither and thither without finding a smell of a bear; and then, of a sudden, when not more than a dozen rods ahead of Crockett and the two boys, although out of their sight, they burst into a wild tumult of clamor that told the hunters that they had started a hot bear, and were hanging close to his heels.

"Jump lively, boys!" Crockett shouted, leaping forward. "The dogs have got old Bruin cornered, or I don't understand dog language, and there's going to be a mighty lively scrimmage," and he sprang over the logs and through the brush as if his muscles were made of steel and his skin of iron.

Trav and Tom followed him as swiftly as they could, and soon came upon the barking, yelping dogs, swarming excitedly about an opening under the trunks of three huge trees that had fallen in such a way as to form a cave large enough for a bear to crawl into. Davy Crockett was in the midst of the jumping dogs, his rifle cocked and held ready for instant use, attempting to get a sight of the animal under the logs.

"What is it? What is it?" cried both of the excited boys, pushing their way in amongst the dogs.

"A bear, and a whopper," Davy answered, never taking his eyes from the opening. "I saw him

charge the dogs just as I came up. But it's so tarnal dark in there I can't get a sight of him good enough to shoot by. Supposing you boys see if you can't find a hole between the trunks, into which you can poke a rifle and fire it off, and stir the old fellow up. I and the dogs will be ready for him, if he comes out."

Tray and Tom at once began a hurried examination of the fallen tree trunks.

"Here's a hole!" Tom shouted presently. "Look out, Davy, I'm going to fire into it," and he thrust his rifle into the hole and pulled the trigger.

There was a muffled report, followed by an angry roar from the bear; and then, before either boy knew what was happening, they heard Davy Crockett's rifle, and saw a black monster plunging out of the cave opening and rushing straight toward Colonel Crockett. Tray threw his rifle to his shoulder; but, at that moment, Bing and the other dogs sprang upon the bear from the rear, and, in an instant, there was such a confused jumble of bear and dogs that he could not shoot with any certainty of hitting the bear.

"Don't fire! Don't shoot!" Crockett cried. "You might kill a dog. I'll get him with my butcher," and, drawing his hunting-knife, he sprang toward that struggling mass of bear and dogs.

At this moment the bear shook himself free from the dogs, rose on his hind feet, and lunged straight toward Davy Crockett; and the horrified boys saw



Both boys sprang to Crockett's help.

man and beast go to the ground together, and roll over and over in a tremendous life and death struggle. Both boys, with faces white as milk, but without an instant's hesitation, sprang to Crockett's help, Trav trying to get a shot at the beast with his rifle, and Tom striving to stab him with his hunting-knife. But so swiftly did the fighting bear and man change places, that Trav did not dare to shoot nor Tom to stab for fear of hitting Crockett, while the dogs hung back as if they, too, were fearful of doing more harm to the man than to the bear, should they attempt to aid him.

But Davy Crockett needed no help; for, suddenly, the anxious boys saw him spring from the embrace of those dreadful arms, saw his knife flash an instant in the air, saw the strength go suddenly from the bear and his huge body collapse; and then Davy Crockett stood before them, white and panting, but unharmed and smiling.

"Wish I may be shot, if that wasn't a mighty tight squeeze!" and Crockett began carefully feeling of his ribs. "Not a one cracked," he continued with smiling satisfaction. "Thought sure the brute would bust my biler before I could get my butcher into him. Reckon that'll make a mighty fine pelt for Kitty-Cat," and he regarded the huge carcass critically. "Must weigh about six hundred pounds. About the biggest bear I ever killed. Hi, there, Lazybones! Hurry up!" he shouted, as the crashing of brush announced, as he supposed, the

coming of Sam McNelly and Jonas. "We've just got the father of all Texas bears. I knowed I was a-going to have a tussle with a big bear, when I dreamed of fighting with a big black nigger," and he turned again to Trav and Tom, who stood staring at him and the dead bear. "I never knowed that dream to— Screeching painters, if it ain't a couple of strangers!" and he stared in astonishment at the two men who now appeared pushing their way through the brush toward them.

Trav and Tom turned quickly, and saw a great, powerfully built man, over six feet tall, dressed in buckskin breeches, with a Mexican blanket thrown around his shoulders, and a broad sombrero on his head, advancing toward them with all the stately dignity of mien of an Indian chief. In one hand he carried a long-barreled Remington rifle, and, from a belt that showed under the folds of the blanket, protruded the butts of a couple of pistols and the handle of a large hunting-knife. His companion was a medium-sized man, with black hair, piercing black eyes, and a face tanned and seamed by exposure until it had the appearance of being covered with brown, wrinkled leather. He, also, was dressed in deerskin, and carried a long weather-beaten rifle, that looked as rugged and as ready for any business, however deadly, as its owner; and the quiet stealthiness with which he moved over the ground, like the dignified mien of his companion,

also suggested something of the Indian in its silence and ease.

"Who can they be?" Tom whispered hurriedly to Trav, his eyes on the strangers.

"I don't know," Trav whispered back. "But that big fellow looks as if he might be the Grand Mogul of all Texas himself— But, say, I do know the little fellow! It's—" and his face flushed with excitement. "It's—yes, I am sure, it's Deaf Smith, the best scout and Indian fighter in all Texas. I saw him once at San Felipe, and I could never forget nor mistake that face."

"Deaf Smith!" and Tom's eyes devoured the wiry form of the famous scout, whose wonderful skill in woodcraft and coolness and daring in moments of peril had made his name and fame known to every boy in Texas. "Deaf Smith! I wonder what he is doing here? and who that big man is with him? See—see, Trav, Davy knows him!" and Tom pointed to Davy Crockett, who, with outstretched hand and a look of pleased surprise on his face, was hurrying toward the tall stranger.

"Wish I may be shot, if this ain't General Sam!" "Davy Crocket, by the eternal!" they heard the two men exclaim, as they clasped hands.

"Thought you were in Tennessee shooting bears, Colonel," continued the huge stranger. "I heard that your constituents had given you a vacation," and his eyes twinkled, "and I supposed that you

were following your favorite vocation of bear-hunting in the woods of Tennessee. But," and his glance turned to the dead bear and the dogs, "I see that you have concluded to come to Texas to hunt your bears, Colonel," and his shrewd eyes looked keenly into Davy Crockett's face. "You are most cordially welcome, most cordially welcome just now, Colonel," and again he gripped Davy Crockett's hand and shook it warmly.

"I am mighty glad to see you, General," Crockett responded heartily, "but I no more expected to see you walk out of that brush than I did to see the emperor of Turkey. Powerful big bear," and he glanced toward the dead beast; "but Betsey and I are looking for bigger game than that in Texas. Reckon we can find any, General?" and he smiled.

At this moment Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford pushed their way through the brush, and paused in astonishment at the sight of the two strangers. Crockett's quick eye at once caught sight of them.

"Here, Sam, Jonas," he called. "Come here. Here's something better than bear," and he grinned like a young schoolboy.

Sam and Jonas at once advanced to where Crockett stood with the strangers; and Trav and Tom followed close behind them, their ears fairly burning with eagerness to hear the name of the stalwart stranger, whose remarkable appearance and stately mien had so keenly awakened their curiosity and interest.

“This is,” and Davy Crockett paused to make the introduction more impressive, doubtless a trick his Washington experiences had taught him, “General Sam Houston, commander-in-chief of the armies of Texas, and his chief of scouts, Deaf Smith, the pluckiest little bunch of muscles and blood and bones ever put into a human skin,” and Crockett pulled off his coonskin cap and bowed to the two men, doubtless another little trick he had learned while at Washington.

CHAPTER IV

AN ADVENTURE WITH A MEXICAN

GENERAL SAM HOUSTON, Commander-in-Chief of the Texan Armies!

No wonder that Trav and Tom stared with wide-opened eyes at the tall stranger; for the man before them, even at that date, was one of the most remarkable and picturesque characters in the western world, and his name had sounded big in their ears from early childhood.

They knew the wonderful story of how, when but a boy, he had fled from the drudgery of a clerkship in a store to the tents of the Cherokee Indians, telling his brothers that he preferred measuring deer-tracks to measuring tape, and had been adopted into the family of Oo-loo-tee-kah, or John Jolly, as he was better known to the English, one of the Indian sub-chiefs, and had lived and dressed like an Indian until he was eighteen years old, when he had suddenly left his Indian friends, returned to his home, secured a school, and had taught it to the satisfaction of all concerned.

They remembered the brave words of his Spartan-like mother, who, when a little later he enlisted in the American Army to help fight the British in

the War of 1812, had said to him, as she handed him his musket: "There, my son, take this musket, and never disgrace it; for remember, I had rather all my sons should fill one honorable grave than that one of them should turn his back to save his life. Go; and remember, too, that while the door of my cabin is ever open to brave men, it is eternally shut to all cowards!" They knew how bravely he had lived up to those heroic words at the Battle of To-ho-pe-ka, where he had been so seriously hurt that the wound never healed, and had won the admiration and friendship of General Jackson, his commander, by his gallantry.

They had heard a thousand times the romantic and dramatic and mystifying story of his political life, culminating in his election to the governorship of Tennessee, his sudden resignation of that high office, his desertion of his young and beautiful wife, not three months married, and his return to the wild life of his Indian friends, the Cherokees, where he had resumed his Indian name of Co-lon-neh, the Raven, and the Indian dress and habits, even marrying an Indian woman after his wife had secured a divorce, and sinking so low in his debaucheries that his Indian friends renamed him the "Big Drunk." Now, he had again aroused himself at the call of Texas; and was there at the head of her armies to help her fight her battles for Liberty and Independence against the greed and oppression of Mexico.

No wonder, I say, that Trav and Tom stood, staring open-eyed, at this remarkable man, whose remarkable history had been the talk of their glowing fireside on many a long dark night, and whose name had won a place in their hearts something like that held by the fabled heroes of old.

And now this mystifying and picturesque hero was actually there before them, ready to grasp and shake their hands!

“Two more stalwart sons of Texas,” and with a smile, General Houston turned from shaking hands with Sam McNelly and Jonas and warmly gripped the hands of Trav and Tom. “Two more stalwart sons that I am sure will be ready to fly to her defense, if she calls, will you not, my brave lads?”

“Yes, sir, that we will,” responded Trav, his face flushing and his eyes sparkling. “We are ready to go now. We don’t need to be called. We know that Texas needs the help of her sons; and, if our fathers would let us, we would be in your army before another sunrise, ready to fight the Mexicans. We are not very old; but we both can shoot straight, and we are not afraid, at least not of Greasers.”

“Nor of panthers and bears,” Davy Crockett broke in, as Trav paused in confusion, for he suddenly realized that he was talking “big,” and to General Sam Houston! “As I am ready to testify,” continued Davy, giving Trav a hearty slap on the shoulder. “They’re the real grit from toe-nails to scalp-locks. But, I reckon, Texas ain’t so short of

men yet that she needs to send her boys to fight her battles."

"No, the men of Texas can fight the battles of Texas," responded General Houston, his eyes resting admiringly on the bright, resolute faces of the two youths. "But she is proud to know that she has such boys, who will soon grow to be men, to depend on in the future. And, my lads," he continued, "you can do a great work for Texas by staying at home to protect and care for the women and children, when she calls her men to her defense. Santa Anna is said to be even now marching on Texas at the head of an army, to drive Liberty from our free hearthstones with bullets and bayonets and musket butts, and to make us free Texans cringe before the might of his power, even as he does his cowardly Mexicans; but—"

"We've got a mighty big surprise party waiting for him, General," burst out Davy Crockett, his dark eyes flashing and his muscular hands tightening their grip on Betsey. "We will show him how brave men, born in freedom, would rather die than yield an inch to a tyrant. But, I reckon, if we die, we won't die alone," he finished grimly, little realizing then how heroically he was later to redeem his words, at America's Thermopylæ, the Alamo.

"Santa Anna, backed by all Mexico, can never conquer men fired by such patriotism and courage. If he dares to invade Texas, we will—"

The stalwart form of General Houston suddenly

staggered backward with the cry: "My God, I'm shot!" while at the same instant the sharp crack of a rifle was heard, sounding from a thick mass of broken trees that the hurricane had piled one up on the other some seventy-five yards from where they were standing.

With cries of horror Trav and Tom, who stood the nearest to General Houston, sprang forward to catch him, as he reeled backward; but, before their hands could touch him, he straightened up with a yell of exultation.

"Only creased, by the eternal!" he cried, withdrawing his hand from his forehead, whence trickled a tiny stream of red. "The villain!" and, gripping his rifle, his face glowering with rage, he sprang toward the spot whence the rifle ball had come; but, before he had taken two steps, the strong hand of Deaf Smith caught him by the shoulder and quickly pulled him behind a tree.

"Jest wait a bit, General," and the scout's keen eyes turned to search the spot where a little cloud of smoke rested above the mass of broken trees. "Thar might be another loaded rifle behind them trees that won't miss," and, carefully shielding his body behind a tree, he began coolly reloading his rifle, which he had fired at the smoke of their hidden enemy's gun with such sudden swiftness that there seemed not a second's difference between the sounds of the two reports. "Nuthin' movin'," he continued,

as he rammed the ball down the long barrel of his rifle, still keeping his eyes on the pile of broken trees. "Reckon Davy an' me 'd better do some reconniterin'. 'Twon't do tew run intew no ambuscade. Now, keep a tree atween you an' that brush heap, till we've discovered th' color of this devilment, white or red or Mexican. Take tew th' right, Davy," and, nodding to Crockett, who stood behind a tree at his side, he disappeared so swiftly and silently among the trees to the left of where he stood, that to Trav and Tom it seemed as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"Keep both eyes peeled on that brush pile," Crockett warned, as he glided by the two trees behind which Trav and Tom had jumped the moment they saw that General Houston had not been hurt seriously, "and, if you see anything moving, blaze away as quick as a streak of greased lightning," and he, too, silently vanished among the trees and brush, going to the right.

Trav and Tom had been greatly startled by the sudden unexpectedness of that nearly fatal shot, coming so mysteriously from out the depths of the silent woods; and now, as they stood behind their trees, their eyes on the spot where the shot had been fired and their guns held ready for instant use, wondering what lay hidden beyond that fateful pile of broken trees—Indians, or Mexicans, or white desperadoes—their hearts were thumping against their

ribs like hammers. But, not a sound broke the silence of the woods, and not a movement betrayed the presence of their mysterious enemy.

Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford crouched, each behind his tree, one on either side of the boys, while General Houston stood half a dozen feet in front of them, behind the trunk of a huge cottonwood. The dogs had disappeared altogether, doubtless in search of another bear,

Those were perilous times in Texas; and travelers through her lonely forests and across her great plains had to be not only on their guard against roving bands of hostile Indians, but, also, against the more dangerous white outlaws and the treacherous Mexicans, who had taken advantage of the unsettled condition of governmental affairs to work out their private schemes of vengeance and plunder, and woe to the man who now had an enemy among them. In some unguarded moment his cowardly foe would strike; and there would be only ruins to tell where once a settler had built his home, or he would be waylaid and shot from ambush. Hence our friends had only showed their wisdom in thus quickly getting behind trees and staying there, until they knew more of the danger that threatened them.

Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, without a sound or a sign coming from the silent forest around to tell them where or what their enemy was; and then, suddenly, off to their right, they heard the barking and yelping of the dogs, quickly followed

by a rifle shot and a louder and more furious outburst from the dogs, now sounding nearer, as if the animals were coming in their direction, and ending in a tumultuous clamor of barks and yelps apparently coming from a thick bunch of tall cottonwoods growing not ten rods from where they were standing.

"Another bear, and the dogs have treed him not ten rods away!" Trav exclaimed, glancing excitedly in the direction of the barking dogs, and then turning a longing face to General Houston.

"Go it, youngsters," laughed Houston, correctly reading the longing in the boy's face, "and get that bear. We three men will stay on guard. Quick—Now!" and, throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he covered the suspected pile of broken trees, ready to fire on the instant should the enemy make a hostile move.

Trav and Tom needed no second bidding, and, stooping low, they darted swiftly from behind their trees, and ran at full speed in the direction of the barking dogs. They found the dogs growling and yelping furiously underneath a great cottonwood that stood a little apart from the other trees.

"Can you see the bear?" Tom panted excitedly, as the two lads came to a stop a little distance from this tree, his eyes eagerly searching its top. "I can't seem to find— Ah, there he is, hugging the trunk close! My first shot!" and he joyfully raised his rifle to his shoulder and glanced along the gun

barrel; but, before he could pull trigger, a brown horny hand shot out, and caught the barrel, and pulled the rifle aside; and Tom turned in astonishment to find the leathery face of the scout, Deaf Smith, close to his own.

“Killin’ ain’t none tew good for th’ reptile,” and the scout’s eyes glinted savagely; “but, I reckon, th’ general would like tew have a talk with him afore th’ killin’ begins. Come down out of that tree, you yeller vermint, or you’ll find somethin’ worse than dog’s teeth bitin’ your hide,” and he threw his long-barreled rifle suggestively to his shoulder and pointed it upward into the tree at Tom’s bear.

“Why, it’s a man!” gasped Tom, as the supposed bear, under the threat of the scout, began slowly climbing down the tree, casting many anxious and terrified glances at the growling dogs and the stern face of Deaf Smith.

“Call th’ dogs off. He ain’t fit for dog-meat,” and Deaf Smith stepped toward the trunk of the tree to be ready to receive the man when he reached the ground.

Trav and Tom, tremendously excited by this unexpected appearance of a man in the place of the bear they thought the dogs had treed, at once hurried to the tree, and, calling off the still savagely growling animals, stared wonderingly at the man descending from his lofty perch to the ground with such evident reluctance that the grim scout was compelled to threaten him again and again before

he at last stood cowering and glowering on the hard earth.

"First time I ever knowed dogs to tree a two-legged bear," laughed Davy Crockett, stepping into view at this moment. "Ugly as a stone fence, and wicked looking as a rattlesnake," and he stepped up close and scrutinized the face of the captive keenly. "Mexican, and a mighty poor specimen at that, I take it," he continued, as he noted the dark scowling features, the glittering snake-like eyes, and the inky-black hair of the prisoner. "Reckon we needn't look any further for the skunk that fired that shot," and he turned to the scout.

"He's th' skunk," Deaf Smith agreed emphatically. "I sot th' dogs on his trail. Mighty knowin' dog that yeller cur. Scotched yer shoulder, did he?" and he glanced to where Bing sat a few feet away, licking a wound in his shoulder and growling and keeping an eye on the Mexican. "Wal, 'twas a mighty lucky thing for you, old feller, 'twas a Greaser ahind that gun when it went off. Call th' general an' th' rest," and he turned to Trav, who at once started on the run for the place where he had left General Houston and his father and Jonas.

General Houston, on reaching the cottonwood tree, strode straight to the trembling Mexican, and, for a minute, stood glaring down into the face of the shivering wretch without speaking a word.

The Mexican's face turned the color of yellow chalk, and he involuntarily threw up one arm, as if

to ward off the accusing glare of those stern eyes, and, backing up against the trunk of the tree, stood silent and cringing, yet with such a murderous glitter in his narrow beady black eyes that it was evident only his cowardly soul kept him from plunging the dagger in his belt into the heart of the man before him.

“I do not know you. I can never have harmed you. Why do you wish to kill me? Tell me—” and, with a quick step forward, General Houston gripped the man by the throat—“Tell me who paid you to fire that cowardly shot, or, by the eternal, I’ll choke the black life out of your red throat!” and the muscular hand tightened about the writhing neck.

“Mercy, mercy, señor!” gasped the man. “Mercy! I will tell all. Only choke not the life out of my throat. Mercy! I will tell the great señor all.”

“Quick, then,” and General Houston’s hand dropped from his throat. “Who hired you to kill Sam Houston?”

For a minute or two the man stood gasping, leaning weakly against the trunk of the tree, his eyes shifting swiftly from face to face of the angry men circling in front of him, then they again settled sullenly on the face of General Houston.

“Señor, great señor, mercy!” he supplicated. “I the gray back of a deer saw moving in the distant brush, and shot quickly. I that it was the great señor’s sombrero knew it not. By all the saints,

by the Holy Virgin, by all the graves of my ancestors, I swear I knew not it was the great señor. I—Mercy, señor! I—I—”

Again the hand of Houston caught him by the throat in a grip that choked the breath out of him, and held him thus, gasping and writhing for a minute, and then, with an oath, he hurled him to the ground.

“Pull the fangs out of the reptile,” he commanded. “Only a fool would waste time trying to get the truth out of a Mexican. I will take him to San Felipe, and hang him there according to law, unless he turns state’s evidence and tells who hired him to fire that shot,” and he stood silent while Deaf Smith roughly disarmed the Mexican.

“Now,” and General Houston turned to Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett, and Jonas Gifford, who had stood a little to one side while he was dealing with the Mexican, “Deaf Smith and I must be on our way to San Felipe, where I am due to-night. We heard your rifle shots and turned aside to see who the hunters were; and very glad I am that we did, for it has given me great pleasure to meet my old Tennessee friend, Colonel Crockett, and to know that Texas was to have the help of his deadly rifle; and, also, to meet these two sturdy settlers, who, I am sure, will be ready with their rifles, when Texas calls,” and his eyes rested admiringly on the giant frame of Sam McNelly.

“The moment Santa Anna at the head of an

army steps on the free soil of Texas, we are ready to shoulder our rifles and to fight for our homes and our freedom," answered Sam McNelly, his honest face glowing with resolution. "And, I reckon, one American is worth about a dozen cowardly Greasers."

"Two dozen, if he is as big as Sam McNelly," laughed General Houston.

"Sam McNelly! He, Big Sam McNelly?" and a gleam of venom shot from the Mexican's eyes as they shifted swiftly to the huge frame of the backwoodsman, and he half started from the ground, where he had been hurled by the powerful arm of General Houston; but, suddenly controlling himself, he sank back again and glared sullenly around.

"You know me!" and Sam McNelly sprang to the side of the Mexican, and, seizing him by both his shoulders, closely scrutinized his face for a minute. "Well, that's more than I can say of you," and he let go of the man and straightened up, while a look of relief came on his face. "But I will know you, if we ever meet again. Now," and he towered threateningly over the cringing Mexican, "why did the name of Sam McNelly make you jump, as if someone had jabbed the point of a knife into your cowardly hide?"

"I know not Sam McNelly. But," and the venom again shot from the Mexican's eyes, "I remember to have heard the name Big Sam McNelly."

"And how, single-handed, he whipped a dozen of

you Greasers one night in San Felipe that he found tormenting a young girl; I'll warrant you remember that, too, Mexico," broke in Jonas Gifford. "Cracked the skulls of two of your brave dons with his bare fist, did he not, Mexico?"

"Si, señor; cracked the skulls of two," repeated the Mexican. "I remember to have heard—Cracked the skulls of two. Mexicans love a great fighter, señor."

"Well, there ain't no love in them eyes you keep turning on Sam McNelly; but, I reckon, Sam can look out for himself, when it comes to Greasers," and Jonas turned from the Mexican to where Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett were holding a whispered conversation a few feet away.

A minute or two later Davy Crockett turned to Sam Houston.

"General," he said, "if you'll just wait until we skin that last bear and gather up the hides and meat of the other two, we'll ride with you until you are safely out of the woods, as a sort of an honorary bodyguard, and to prevent any more Mexicans mistaking your big sombrero for a deer's back and taking a pot-shot at you," and he smiled.

General Houston, after a short consultation with Deaf Smith, heartily accepted their proffered company; and, as speedily as possible, the skins of the three bears and such parts of the flesh as they wished for food were carried to where they had left their horses, packed on the animals' backs; and the

little cavalcade started for San Felipe, General Houston and Deaf Smith mounted on horses that they had left tied a short distance away, and the Mexican, with his hands bound behind his back, riding a sturdy little pony that they had found fastened to a cottonwood a short distance beyond the place where the dogs had treed the man. At the head rode Deaf Smith and Davy Crockett; then came General Houston and Sam McNelly, with the prisoner riding between them; while Jonas and the two boys made up the rear-guard. The dogs scouted to the front and sides, doubtless hoping to start another bear.

The forest through which our friends were riding was absolutely wild, just as the great hand of nature formed it. Mighty trees towered high above their heads, huge trunks lay rotting on the ground, and, in places, they found the underbrush and small trees growing so thickly that they were often compelled to turn aside in order to find openings large enough for their horses to pass through.

Suddenly, not a rod in front of their horses' noses and while they were in the midst of one of these thickets of small trees, Bing, with a startled yelp that instantly summoned every other dog to his assistance, sprang back from an opening under the roots of a large fallen tree, into which he had poked an investigating nose, just in time to avoid the spring of an enraged mother panther that had here made her home. The panther was furious, and in

an instant, before a shot could be fired, she had leaped again and landed into the midst of the yelping, snarling, growling dogs, and the whirling mass of dogs and panther rolled almost under the terrified horses' heels.

The horses jumped and plunged and crowded madly together, insane with sudden fright; and for a minute it was impossible to control them sufficiently for anyone to go to the help of the dogs; then Davy Crockett flung his bridle rein to Deaf Smith and leaped from his saddle, knife in hand. But by this time the dogs had had more than enough of panther fighting, and, yelping and howling with fright and pain from the wounds made by the teeth and claws of the furious beast, they fled, just as Crockett's feet struck the ground; and, with an angry snarl, the panther whirled and faced him, crouching ready to spring. But that leap was never made, for at this instant Sam Houston fired, and the panther sank to the ground, dead, a rifle ball through her brain. As the panther fell two half grown cubs ran out of the den under the roots of the fallen tree, and were instantly set upon by the dogs; and for a couple of minutes there was the liveliest kind of a fight.

Trav and Tom and the men sprang from their horses, now become quiet, and crowded close around the fighting animals, each one anxious to get in a blow that would help the dogs finish the two young panthers.

Suddenly Deaf Smith whirled around.

"That cussed Greaser has vamosed!" he shouted, and sprang on the back of his horse, and dashed off in the woods, following the trail left by the fugitive, who had cunningly taken advantage of the confusion and excitement caused by the sudden appearance of the panther to make his escape.

Instantly the fighting dogs and panthers were forgotten, and all hurriedly mounted their horses, and did their best to recapture the Mexican; but even Deaf Smith soon lost the trail and could not find it again, and they were forced to give up the search, and continue on their way to San Felipe without the prisoner.

"'Tain't no excuse, that painter; 'tain't no excuse for five full-growed white men an' a couple of hefty boys lettin' a Greaser slip through their fingers as slick as we did," grumbled the old scout, as they resumed their journey. "Don't tell anyone what idjits we've been. I'd never hear th' last on it, if 'twas known that Deaf Smith let an ornery Greaser get away like that."

"Well, I reckon, them three panther pelts are worth more than the Mexican's hide anyhow," laughed Crockett, who managed to squeeze a laugh or a joke out of everything, even disasters.

"I wish I knew who was back of that shot," mused General Houston. "I wish I knew who was back of that shot. Yes, I fancy you are right, Deaf Smith. We'd better keep this little adventure to

ourselves. It certainly doesn't reflect much credit on our vigilance. But, you know, even Jove himself sometimes nods. So, my friends, you will oblige me by saying nothing of our meeting with the slippery Mexican. But now we must hasten on our way, or I fear we shall not reach San Felipe tonight, and important matters are awaiting my attention there," and his face clouded. The Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of Texas was not finding his pathway strewn with roses, and was busy even then endeavoring to turn aside the thorns growing on friendly trees that threatened to wound Texas much more seriously than did the bullets of Santa Anna's army.

The face of Sam McNelly, also, was clouded with trouble. He could not forget the look of malignant hatred that had flamed up at him out of the Mexican's eyes; and now the man was free, and his wife and child and home were unprotected. He did not believe the cowardly Mexican would dare to harm them, at least not that day; and yet he could not get rid of a feeling of uneasiness, of dread, when he thought of his wife and Kitty, sweet little Kitty who had curled herself up so snugly in his great loving heart, when he thought of them alone and unprotected in his lonely log cabin. He did not speak of his fears; but, when after an hour's ride, they passed out of the woods and came to a road that ran through an open country direct to San Felipe, where it had been agreed that the honorary bodyguard

would be dismissed, he was exceedingly glad, for now he could hasten homeward and have his fears set at rest by the welcoming smiles of his wife and child.

“Thank you, friends,” General Houston said, as the little cavalcade came to a halt on the road, “for the protection and pleasure your company has brought me; and, if ever Sam Houston can be of service to you, do not hesitate to command him. Now I must bid you a hasty farewell, for I am anxious to get to San Felipe as speedily as possible,” and he shook hands with all, and then he and Deaf Smith galloped off down the road toward San Felipe, both turning in their saddles to wave them a last farewell as they passed out of sight over the brow of a little hill.

CHAPTER V

THE MESSAGE OF THE DAGGER

“NOW for home,” Sam McNelly cried, the moment General Houston and Deaf Smith passed from view. “I’ll feel better after I’ve looked into mother’s eyes and felt Kitty’s warm arms around my neck. I reckon the poison in that Greaser’s eyes kinder got into my blood. Anyway I feel mighty anxious to get home; so we’ll just get a quick hustle on these beasts,” and he urged his horse into a fast trot.

“And I’m mighty anxious to show Kitty-Cat how well I kept my promise,” laughed Crockett, glancing quickly at the troubled face of his big friend and urging on his own horse. “Two bearskins? She shall have the three! Wish I may be shot, if she shan’t,” and his dark eyes softened. “Seems ’most as if I could see her right now, dancing around that big bearskin and exclaiming, ‘My, but ain’t he a whopper, Davy! Ain’t he a whopper!’ And he is a whopper! About the biggest bear I ever shot. But, I shouldn’t wonder if we’d be hunting bigger game than bears and painters mighty soon, if what General Sam says about Santa Anna is true, and I reckon he knows, if anybody in Texas does.”

“Do you really think we’ll have to fight Mexico?” Trav inquired, riding up close to the side of Davy Crockett. “Do you really think Santa Anna will dare to lead an army against us?” and his young face flushed. “We don’t think much of the courage of Mexicans down here. But, if he should dare, if he should dare to try to play the tyrant over us, we’ll give him all the fighting he wants,” and his blue eyes glinted. “We were born free, and we will live free, or we will die free.”

“Crickety crumpets, what a young fire-eater we have here!” grinned Crockett. “I reckon if Santa Anna knowed what he was coming up against, you couldn’t pull him across the boundary line with a forty-mule team of elephants. But,” and his face sobered, “I’m mighty proud to see your dander flare up when anybody or anything threatens the freedom of your country. That’s the kind of boys and men that’ll make a country great in war and great in peace. And, as for Santa Anna, seeing that he’s a sort of second cousin to old Lucifer himself from all I can hear, I reckon he’s bound to come, just to make good his character for devilment. But,” and his eyes glinted, “he’ll know more about what real Anglo-Saxon, American, liberty-loving grit is before he goes back, just as sure as he fires a gun in behalf of tyranny in Texas.”

“’Pears to me Trav ain’t the only fire-eater in Texas, Davy,” smiled Sam McNelly. “But, I’m too dead anxious to get home and know for certain

that mother and Kitty are all right to waste any time talking about even Santa Anna. Come on, we'll give the horses a gallop along this level road," and, striking his spurs into his horse, he galloped off over a flat plain that stretched for half a dozen miles in front of them.

Trav and Tom glanced apprehensively at the faces of the men. There was a worried, anxious look on the countenance of each; and their own hearts sank, as they thought of the scowling, vindictive face of the Mexican, and what his escape might portend to the defenseless women and children at home, on whom he might seek to wreak the vengeance of his hatred against Sam McNelly and his captors. But they were too well versed in the stern ways of their fathers to ask any questions; and rode on after them in silence, until the plain was crossed and they had reached the ridge of hills that separated it from the forest beyond.

"Now, in two minutes we'll know if everything is safe at home," Trav said, his face whitening, as without a moment's pause they galloped up the ridge. "From the top we can see our house. I—I don't know what I should do if—if anything had happened to mother and Kitty," and his voice trembled. "Oh, I must hurry!" and, in his anxiety, he struck his horse violently with his whip, and, thus urged, the animal leaped ahead of the others, and reached the top of the ridge first.

Trav gave a swift glance toward the spot where

with so much loving toil the little log cabin had been reared; and then, with a glad yell, he whirled half-way around in his saddle.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" he shouted back. "They are safe! And mother is getting supper ready. I can see the supper-smoke curling out above the chimney," and he pointed joyously to where a half a mile away, secure and unharmed, stood the little log cabin, the smoke rising hospitably above its friendly roof.

"Mother Jane is getting ready that table full of hot johnny-cake, I'll wager a coonskin against a turkey's feather. Seems as if I could smell them right now," and Crockett sniffed longingly and wrinkled up his face so comically that both boys laughed aloud. It was easy to laugh now.

Sam McNelly did not say anything; but the look of relief that swept over his anxious face, when his eyes rested on the peaceful scene, was good to see, and he pulled up his horse, contented now to give the tired animal a rest.

"Oh, say, let's give Kitty-Cat and Mother Jane a heap big surprise," suggested Davy Crockett, as all came to a halt on the top of the ridge, his eyes sparkling like the eyes of an excited boy. "They are not expecting us home so early, and so won't be on the lookout for us; and, if we are careful, we can tie our horses a few rods from the house, creep up unseen to the door, and suddenly burst in upon them, like a band of yelling Injuns. Won't Kitty-Cat

hop up and down and dance and yell and laugh, when she sees us all come tumbling in? And won't her eyes sparkle and her cheeks grow red and pretty, when I throw the three bearskins, the big one on top, down at her feet? Whoopa! I'm so almighty glad to see that little log cabin standing there unharmed and peaceful-looking as a picture, that I must do something to blow off steam; and I reckon that's about the way the rest of you are feeling."

Indeed, the sudden reaction from the keenest anxiety to the apparent certainty that the settler's little home was safe and sound, had been like rich wine in the veins of all our friends; and all, like Crockett, felt as if they must "do something to blow off steam"; and, consequently, his proposal was received with great favor, especially by Trav and Tom, and immediate preparations were made to storm the lonely log cabin.

"I'll bet a coonskin Kitty spies us before we reach the door," Trav declared, as they rode slowly toward the house. "She has the sharpest eyes and ears of any girl in Texas."

"I'll take you," Crockett replied promptly. "Now, we'll tie our horses here, and creep up around behind the barn, and make a silent rush from the barn for the door. Remember, nobody must utter a sound until we're right smack up against the door," and he jumped from his horse and quickly tied him to a tree. Then he gathered the three

bearskins in his muscular arms, and cautiously crept toward the barn, followed by the others, who had also dismounted and tied their horses.

Every moment they expected to see the door of the log cabin flung open and Kitty come flying out; but, not a sound or a movement came from the house, and they reached the barn unseen.

"I reckon that coonskin is mine, Trav," Crockett smiled, as the little party halted for a moment behind the barn.

"Wait," answered the boy. "We're not to the house yet. Kitty will hear us when we make the rush."

The barn was only three or four rods from the house, and stood facing the windowless chimney-end of the log cabin. Consequently, if they were not heard, there was little danger of their being discovered on their way from the barn to the house.

"Now," grinned Crockett, his twinkling eyes on the excited faces of the two lads, "listen to my plan of campaign. We'll make a dash from the barn to the house-chimney. Then, silent as Injuns, we'll creep around close to the sides of the house to the door; and then, when we're all ready, Trav'll suddenly throw open the door, and I'll jump in with my wildest war-whoop, followed by the rest of you, screeching like painters, and throw the three bear-skins down at Kitty-Cat's feet. I'll bet Mother Jane'll let out a scream that'll loosen the shingles on the roof; and the next instant be ready for us with

the frying-pan or stove-poker or whatever weapon happens to be within reach of her hands," and Crockett grinned joyously at the thought of Mrs. McNelly's chagrin, when she discovered from whom the racket came. "Ready, everybody," and he crept cautiously toward the corner of the barn. "Go!" and away he started for the house, running swiftly but noiselessly; and after him came the others.

At the chimney they paused for an instant to listen. Not a sound came from within the house.

"Must be all asleep," grinned Crockett. "Now, for the door. Remember, not a sound until Trav throws open the door. Come on," and he cautiously stole around the side of the house to the closed door.

At the door they again paused to listen. Still not a sound came from within the house.

"Queer, mighty queer," thought Trav, as his hand stole silently to the door-latch.

Crockett looked around, and saw that all were ready.

"Now, let her go!" he whispered to Trav, holding himself ready to bound into the house the moment the door opened.

Trav instantly pushed up the latch, swung open the door, and, with a yell that would have done credit to the most savage of Indians, Crockett leaped in; and after him tumbled the others pell-mell, shouting and laughing and yelling as loudly

and as fast as they could make their tongues go. But, suddenly, the yell choked in the throat of each, and all stared blankly, with horrified eyes, around the familiar room.

The fire was burning briskly in the wide fireplace. On the table was a great pan of johnny-cake dough; and by its side stood a dish of half-peeled potatoes. The knife lay on the floor, where it had been hastily dropped, as if the potato peeling had been suddenly interrupted. A torn apron hung across one of the rude chairs. A pan of milk had been knocked off the table, and had rolled half across the floor, which was still damp and slippery from the white fluid. Everything else in the room was in its accustomed place.

“Kitty!—Mother! My God, Crockett, what has happened?” and Big Sam McNelly turned a face white and drawn with heart-agony to Davy Crockett.

Crockett, without a word, his own face whitening and his lips tightening, pointed to the center of the table, where, its sharp blade thrust through a piece of white paper deep into the wood, stood a curiously-wrought, snake-hilted Mexican dagger.

Sam McNelly, with a cry of anguish, leaped to the table, seized the dagger and the piece of paper, and read, scrawled across the white paper, these fateful words:

“He crack skull of two Mexicans
with big bare first; and I, son and

brother of the two Mexicans whose skulls he crack, take wife and girl for blood revenge. If follow; kill. If not follow; not kill; keep for slaves and make do all my dirty work. Si, señor, a Mexican's arm is long and sure, when striking for revenge.

“Adios, señor.”

The dagger and paper dropped from Sam McNelly's hands; and he pressed both palms tightly against his forehead, as if he would keep the anguish within from bursting his brains.

Davy Crockett stooped quickly, and picked up the paper, and read it. Then he seized his rifle.

“Sam,” and he laid a hand on the shoulder of his big friend, “Sam, he's got Kitty-Cat and Mother Jane! Come!” and, without another word, he leaped through the door.

The hands of Sam McNelly fell from his forehead, and, with a roar not unlike that of an aroused lion, he caught up the dagger from the floor and thrust it in his belt, seized his rifle, and sprang after Crockett, his teeth set as if in a vise and the glitter of cold steel in his blue eyes.

Those days bred stern men, who were chary of words, but quick with deeds, when the time for action came.

“Father— What is it? Where is Kitty and mother?” and Trav, his eyes wild with anguish, sprang after his father.

"That cursed Greaser has got them! Get your gun!" Sam McNelly growled back, not pausing an instant in his race after Crockett, who was speeding toward the spot where the horses had been tied.

The moment the horses were reached, Davy Crockett tore a saddle and bridle off one of them.

"These horses are played out. We must have fresh horses. Have you any?" and he turned swiftly to Sam McNelly, the saddle and bridle in his arms.

"Yes, two. In the wood pasture. I will show you," and, with quick hands Sam McNelly pulled off a saddle and a bridle, and, throwing them over his shoulder, ran toward the woods back of the barn, with Crockett by his side.

A hundred rods from the barn they came to a little clearing, completely surrounded by the woods and enclosed by a rail fence; and Crockett's heart gave a glad bound when he saw that the two horses quietly feeding in it were both strong and speedy-looking animals.

"Take the black. The bay is mine," Sam McNelly said, as the two men sprang over the fence.

By the time the horses were saddled and bridled, Trav came hurrying up. Jonas Gifford and Tom had gone to their own home to see if everything was safe there. Trav had been crying, and his eyes were still red and his cheeks wet.

"Courage, Trav. We'll have Kitty-Cat and Mother Jane back, if horse-flesh and man-flesh can

do it," and Crockett laid a firm hand on the boy's shoulder. "Now is the time to show that you are real grit. Better give your horse a couple of hours' rest, and then follow after us with something to eat. We've no time to stop now to provision up."

"Davy is right," and, stern and grim as Nemesis, Sam McNelly towered above his son. "Start on our trail in a couple of hours. Jonas will let Tom come with you, and see to the place while we're away. Bring along an extra lot of powder and ball, and plenty of grub. We won't be back until—" His voice choked and he turned abruptly and flung himself in his saddle— "Now, Davy," and, with set jaws, he dug his spurs into his horse's flanks and galloped off in the direction he knew the abductors must have taken—the way to the nearest Mexican settlement.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE BIG CANEBRAKE

WHEN Trav returned to the house, after unsaddling and caring for the horses, he found Jonas Gifford and his wife and Tom there. Mrs. Gifford had seen no one since her husband and Tom left her that morning, and had not the slightest suspicion that anything was going amiss at her neighbor's until the sudden return of Jonas.

Trav and Tom, aided by Jonas and his wife, at once began preparing to follow Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett; and, when the two hours were up, they were ready, with blankets and food and extra powder and ball strapped on their horses' backs behind the saddles. They had no means of knowing how long they would be gone. It might be but for a few hours, and it might be for days. Nor could they tell what dangers they might be called upon to face. Yet few words were spoken when the time for parting came. Even children were made of stern material in those days; and neither Tom nor Trav expected a "scene" when they said good-by.

"I'll see that everything is taken proper care of until you get back, and hurry everyone I can along

after you to help round-up them infernal Greasers," Jonas Gifford said, as he gripped Trav's hand and wrung it in silent sympathy.

"My boy, my boy, remember that your mother and sister are still in God's keeping. He will protect them," Mrs. Gifford assured Trav, as she threw her motherly arms around his neck and held him close for a moment. "All Mexico can not harm them, unless it is His will. Keep up a brave heart, my boy," and she pressed a kiss on his white lips. "For your mother's and Kitty's sake," she whispered, and turned to where Tom was waiting to say good-by.

Five minutes later Trav and Tom turned in their saddles, at the entrance to the woods, to wave a last farewell to the man and woman standing in front of the lonely little log cabin; and then resolutely turned their eyes to the trail, that led—whither it was well neither boy could foresee.

There was now but little over an hour of the day's sunlight left, and, as the boys were anxious to get as far as possible while they had the daylight to show them the way, they at once urged their horses into a gallop and rode rapidly westward. There was no need of their following directly the trail of Davy Crockett and Sam McNelly. Five miles west flowed the bridgeless Brazos River, with but one fordable crossing in fifteen miles; and they knew, from the direction taken by the Mexicans, that they had ridden straight for this crossing, followed, of

course, by Davy Crockett and Sam McNelly, so that all the boys had to do was to ride to this ford as speedily as possible, where they hoped to find some message left by the men ahead, telling them what course to take from there.

The sun was a great red ball of fire, hanging just above the western horizon, when Trav and Tom reached the ford of the Brazos. As they rode down the bank to the river, there came a rush of feet from behind, and, with joyful barks, Bing bounded and capered around the two horsemen.

“Well, well, old fellow,” Trav greeted him heartily, “I’m mighty glad to see you, though you had no business to follow us. But, I know, I understand; you, too, were lonesome; you, too, wanted to help find mother and Kitty,” and Trav swallowed hard. “I—I won’t send you back. You shall go with us, Bing, old boy.”

Bing showed his joyous approval of this decision by nearly knocking Trav off his horse’s back, in his wild efforts to thank him, dog-fashion, by leaping up to lick his face; and then at once became his usual dignified self, and trotted soberly along by his master’s side down to the river.

“There, there’s word for us!” Tom cried, as they were about to enter the water, and, jumping from his horse, he ran to where a sheet of white paper, torn from a blank book, was thrust through the split end of a stick, which was stuck up in the sand in the edge of the river bank.

On the paper was scrawled, in a hand the boys had some difficulty in reading, these words:

“TO TRAV MCNELLY—

“The Greasers crossed here about two hours ahead of us. Your dad is sure they’re bound for the Mexican settlement at San Antonio; but we’ll get them before they get there, as sure as my name is Davy Crockett. Keep straight on west until you reach the Colorado River, where we’ll wait for you at Mullen’s Ford, unless we’re hot on the trail of the vermin; but it looks now as if they had too much the start for us to catch them before night, and we can’t follow the trail in the dark. But we’ll push right on as far as the Colorado, where we’ll camp and wait for you and the friends that Jonas is going to arouse and hurry after us. Try to reach the Colorado by morning sure. Don’t stop for the dark, as long as you can see to keep going west. Just found a piece of Kitty-Cat’s dress, so we know we’re on the right trail. Keep up your pluck, and we’ll land on them Greasers yet like a ton of bobcats. Wish I may be shot, if we don’t!
——DAVY CROCKETT.”

Trav, with Tom looking anxiously over his shoulder, read this note aloud; and when he had finished he turned to Tom, his young face hard and white.

“It’s a good thirty miles to Mullen’s Ford, and we’ve got to make it to-night,” he said, his jaws coming together firmly. “We’ve got to make it to-night, dark or no dark, Tom. We must not delay Davy and father a moment; but be at Mullen’s Ford sure by daylight, so that they can keep right on after them—them Mexican curs. Oh, but I wish Deaf Smith hadn’t pulled down your rifle, and you’d shot the cowardly skunk, while we had him treed! Think what it would have saved us, and mother and Kitty!” and his voice shook. “Come on. We’ve no time to waste,” and he flung himself fiercely into his saddle, and urged his horse into the water, and soon, with Tom riding close by his side, was galloping westward beyond the Brazos.

Bear in mind that this was at the time when all Texas, with here and there an oasis of civilization, was a vast roadless, bridgeless, houseless, shelterless wilderness, where a man might ride for days and never once catch a glimpse of a human being, nor see a mark made by the hands of man, save the trails of wandering Indians and the scattered ashes of their camp-fires; keep this wild condition of the country well in your mind, my boys, I say, when you think of the long, lonely and dark ride now before our two young friends, Trav, and Tom; and then

you will be able to understand something of the endurance and self-reliance and courage and pluck that had been bred into their young bodies and minds to enable them to start on such a ride, through such a country, during the dark hours of the night, without a moment's hesitation or a cowardly thought of self. They were heroes; but they did not know it—the best kind of heroes; and they would have considered any man or boy, who refused to take such a ride, however perilous to self, under such circumstances, a most shameful coward. Truly, this, the pioneer age, was America's heroic age.

In half an hour after leaving the Brazos the sun had sunk out of sight, and the darkness of night was gathering swiftly; but Trav and Tom did not even slacken the speed of their horses. Every moment of daylight was precious. In an hour it was dark; but, fortunately, the skies were clear, and, like the compassless mariner on the ocean, they could steer their course by the stars. There was no road, no marks of any kind to guide them. All they could do was to keep moving westward, ever westward, galloping swiftly over stretches of treeless plains, stealing cautiously through the dark shadows of great forests, splashing hurriedly across muddy creeks, always with watchful eyes on the stars and the surrounding darkness, and ears keenly alert to catch every sound. They did no talking, seldom spoke, except to their horses. Their

eyes and ears and minds were too busy to be distracted by talking. Sons of the wilderness, they knew only too well the dangers of the wilderness, doubled now by the darkness, and the need of ceaseless vigilance to guard against them, if they would ride through the night to the waters of the Colorado.

Thus, hour after hour, side by side, rode the two boys, with faithful Bing, now running a little ahead, now falling a little behind, but always keeping close to the horses, and frequently glancing up into his master's face, as if seeking to discover the reason for this perilous night ride. The wolves howled threateningly from the surrounding darkness, a panther's scream rang shiveringly through the night air, a wildcat yelled from a tree above their heads; but the boys gave these sounds, terrifying to unaccustomed ears, hardly a thought, and rode steadily on, fearful only that they might not reach the Colorado by morning, and thus delay the pursuit of the Mexicans and the rescue of Kitty and her mother.

A little after midnight they came to one of those impenetrable canebrakes, already described in the first chapter of the book, stretching darkly to the north and to the south of them, and with no visible pathway through it. They rode a few rods to the south along the edge of the canebrake, but found no opening. Then they turned about and rode to the

north, but still they could discover no sign of a passageway.

"We have got to get through," Trav said, halting and glaring at the obstruction, "if we have to cut our way through. This must be the Big Canebrake of Canebrake Creek, and, if so, it is only about a mile wide, but more than twenty miles long. We've got to get through it. We can't take the time to go around it. There must be a passage somewhere. Let's get off our horses and hunt. It's too dark to see well from the saddle," and he sprang to the ground.

Tom promptly agreed to Trav's suggestion, and the two boys at once fastened their horses, and began an anxious search for a way through the canebrake, Bing searching eagerly with them.

Suddenly the dog began sniffing about excitedly on the ground, and then, turning his head to the two boys, who were a few feet behind him, as much as to say, "Just see what my superior senses have enabled me to discover," he uttered a joyful yelp and bounded away into the darkness. In a moment he came dashing back, and, rushing up to Trav, gave a few glad barks, and darted away into the darkness again.

"What do you suppose has got into Bing?" and Trav turned anxiously to Tom. "He's acting mighty queer. Just as if he'd got on the scent of someone he knew and liked. He couldn't," and

Trav caught his breath at the thought. "He couldn't have found the trail of mother and Kitty! Come on! Let's follow him, quick," and Trav hurried after the dog.

Before he had taken a dozen steps Bing came running back, his hair on end and growling savagely, yet still acting as if he was anxious for the boys to follow him, but fearful of getting beyond their protection.

"What is it, old fellow? What is it?" and Trav stroked the head of the dog affectionately. "What have you found? What has frightened you?"

In answer, Bing whined and growled and again started off in the darkness, but this time he kept only a few feet in advance of his master, and was constantly glancing back to see that he was being followed.

"Come on," Trav whispered excitedly, "Bing has surely scented something that needs looking into. He's no fool, that dog."

"But, we must be careful," cautioned Tom. "We don't want to run ker-slap into them Mexicans; and it looks from the way Bing acts as if there might be enemies as well as friends ahead of us. Better call him back and hold on to him, so as to keep him quiet, or he'll let all creation know that we're coming."

Trav saw at once the wisdom of Tom's caution, and, calling Bing back, he held him by the collar, while they continued to advance as cautiously and

as noiselessly as possible through the darkness, allowing the dog to show them the way.

They had gone but a few yards when Bing turned suddenly directly toward the canebrake, and began trying to push his body in between the tall canes, whining appealingly to the two boys as he did so.

"Come, come, old boy; we can't go in there. Your smeller surely must be wrong now. Come," and Trav tried to pull Bing away, but only succeeded in making him strive all the harder to make an entrance into the canebrake. "You old fool, nothing bigger than a coon could have gone in there, and we ain't looking for coons to-night. Come," and the impatient boy gave a violent jerk on the collar, just as Bing had crowded his body half-way in between two large canes; and, to his surprise, both canes came tumbling down on top of him.

"They've both been sharpened and stuck into the ground," Tom whispered excitedly, feeling of the ground-ends of the two canes. "Somebody's plugged up the opening by sticking a lot of canes up in the ground," and, to verify his conjecture, he began pulling violently at the canes in front of him, and brought down half a dozen of them on top of him.

"You're right," whispered Trav, joining excitedly in the pulling down of the canes. "I'll bet the Mexicans did this to throw us off the trail. In the dark nobody would imagine there was an opening here, and it must have been dark when dad

and Davy got here. What if we should find mother and Kitty and their captors camped in the cane-brake?"

"We'd rescue them," Tom declared, his eyes sparkling in the darkness. "We'd rescue them, Trav," and he gripped his rifle hard. "Hurry," and he began working on the canes with renewed vigor.

In five minutes more they had pulled the last of the "planted" canes out of the ground, and the dark opening of a narrow passageway, running into the blackness of the canebrake, appeared before them, like the opening to a long narrow cavern. The surrounding canes, meeting in an arch at the top, shut out the little light the stars afforded, so that within the passageway they could barely see their hand when held within six inches of their eyes.

Bing darted into the opening, and, in a second, came flying back, growling savagely and with his hair standing on end, yet the moment he felt Trav's hand on his collar, he began whining appealingly and pulling toward the black depths before them.

For an instant both boys hesitated, and each turned inquiring eyes toward the other. They well knew the perils that might lie in wait for them within that dark cavern of canes. Wolves or bears or panthers might be coming through it, and meet them in the darkness of the narrow space; and then there was the dreadful thought that yonder

in the blackness somewhere the Mexicans might be waiting to spring upon them.

"For Kitty's sake," and Tom reached out a hand in the darkness and gripped Trav's hand.

"For mother's and Kitty's sake," responded Trav, returning the grip with interest. "Now let us go forward cautiously until we come to Canebrake Creek, then, if the way is clear, we can return and get our horses. Come, Bing, on," and Trav pointed into the black opening.

But Bing slunk back close up to his master's legs, and bristled up his hair, and growled deep down in his throat, and refused to go on ahead, yet he sniffed at the ground, and whined, and looked up appealingly, as if urging the boys to go on.

"All right, old boy. We'll go first," Trav whispered. "Come, Tom, let's touch elbows," and thus, elbow touching elbow, the two brave lads entered the dark passageway, moving as silently as possible, and holding their cocked rifles so that they could instantly throw them to their shoulders, if there were need.

Above their heads the tall canes creaked and moaned and rustled their leaves mysteriously, as the night winds stirred their tops; and more than once the boys stopped in shuddering dread to listen anxiously, so exactly did the rustling sound to their ears like the low whisperings of men.

Bing walked between the two boys, and Trav

every now and then had to lay a hand on his head to silence his low growlings. Suddenly, with a furious bark, he leaped a dozen feet ahead of the boys, and then slowly backed, growling and snarling, to where they stood listening anxiously, their hearts thumping violently and their eyes straining in vain to pierce the darkness ahead.

For many minutes the boys stood silent, not venturing to make the slightest movement, hardly daring to breathe aloud; but not a sound reached their ears, save that made by the canes swaying in the wind above their heads.

"I don't believe there is anything there. Bing must be getting desperate nervous," Trav whispered. "Are you ready to go on, Tom?"

"Yes, but go slow," Tom answered. "I—Ah!—Look out!"

At that instant the darkness immediately in front of them seemed full of moving arms and bodies; and, before either boy could raise his rifle or strike a blow in his defense, he found his head and shoulders and arms enveloped in the folds of a huge blanket, and strong arms pressing the blanket so tightly around him, that, in a moment more, he was absolutely helpless and at the mercy of his captors.

Brave Bing had leaped furiously at the assailants of his master; but, he, too, had been met with a blanket, and in a moment was rolling helpless in its folds on the ground.

Their captors at once and without speaking a

word, began rapidly winding ropes around their muffled bodies, binding their hands so tightly to their sides that they could not move them an inch, and continuing the rope-winding process down their legs to the ankles, until the two boys were almost as tightly trussed up as a pair of Egyptian mummies. This done, one of the men spoke a word of command in Spanish; and, with as little ceremony as if they had been a couple of bags of wheat, Trav and Tom felt themselves lifted from the ground, and tossed on the shoulders of two men, who at once set off with their living burdens, walking swiftly for perhaps ten minutes, when they stopped suddenly and, again as if they had been senseless bags of wheat, dropped both boys on the ground, where they lay helpless and half-suffocated by the tightly-wound folds of the blankets.

CHAPTER VII

ANDREAS VASQUEZ

SO far Trav and Tom had not uttered a word, after their first exclamations of surprise. Indeed, so sudden and in such an unexpected manner had the onset been made, that neither boy had yet quite recovered from the astonishment into which this sudden transformation of himself into an Egyptian mummy had thrown him; and he was still in a half-dazed condition of mind, when the sudden jar of his body striking the ground, as he was roughly tumbled from the shoulder of one of his captors, knocked the wits back into his head.

Trav, after the jar, which, as I have said, brought each lad suddenly back to a realization of his situation, lay for a few minutes listening intently. Of course the blanket prevented him from seeing anything; but he could still hear, although the heavy cloth deadened the sounds before they reached his ears. Four or five men were talking excitedly in Spanish a few feet from him. Unfortunately he could not understand a word of Spanish, but he knew from the tones of their voices that they were greatly excited, and he rightly judged that he and Tom were the subjects of discussion.

He strained his ears in an anxious effort to hear something that might tell him the fate of Tom; but in vain. Not a sound of his comrade reached his ears. Perhaps he had been hurt, possibly killed! Trav shuddered at the thought. He must find out something.

"Tom! Tom!" he called softly, unable to endure the suspense longer.

There was no reply.

"Tom! Tom!" he yelled loudly, the sickening clutch of a great fear on his heart. "If you are alive and all right, ans—"

The toe of a boot struck him in the ribs, and stopped his voice in the midst of a word.

"Shut up!" and again the toe of the boot struck the ribs, followed by a string of Mexican and English oaths.

But Trav had not suffered in vain; for, muffled yet sounding not more than a dozen feet away, the cheery voice of Tom responded: "Sound as a dollar, and trussed up tighter than an Egyptian mummy."

"Same here," Trav called back joyfully, regardless of the prodding boot-toe that again found his ribs.

A few minutes later both boys were again shouldered, and borne some twenty rods farther, when they were once more roughly tumbled to the ground. But now, to their delight, the ropes were untied and unwound from their bodies, and the blanket pulled

off their heads. The moment they were free from the blanket and ropes, two men stepped up to where they lay, whirled them over on their stomachs, and, seizing hold of their arms, pulled their hands up behind their backs, and tied the wrists tightly together with thongs of deerskin. They were now allowed to rise to their feet and to look around them.

A dozen yards away a huge camp-fire glowed redly, and its ruddy light illuminated the wild scene sufficiently for Trav and Tom to make out quite clearly their immediate surroundings.

Near the center of a large circular opening in the surrounding canebrake, that, apparently, had been made by cutting and carrying away the canes, burned the camp-fire; and before this fire, with their backs turned toward them, stood two persons upon whom the eyes of Trav and Tom fixed themselves to the exclusion of everything else.

“Mother!—Kitty!” and Trav started eagerly toward the fire, to be stopped abruptly by a hand thrust roughly on his breast.

“No, no, señor,” and the smiling face—it was smiling now—of the Mexican they had so dramatically captured that day in the woods, thrust itself in front of Trav. “No, no, señor. You my servants must not trouble. Food they cook for me and my men, who are hungry, after a struggle so fierce with the young señors,” and the evil face grinned malignantly not a foot from Trav’s flashing

eyes. It was well for the Mexican that the angry boy's fists were strongly bound behind his back.

At the sound of Trav's voice, Mrs. McNelly, for it was Kitty and her mother who stood before the fire, started so suddenly that she dropped the chunk of venison she was roasting on the end of a long stick into the fire, and whirled quickly around.

"Trav! Trav!" and with outstretched arms she started toward her boy; but, before she had taken two steps, a rough hand seized her and pulled her violently back. At the same time the owner of the hand, a great brutal-looking Mexican, stooped, and, with the other hand, caught up a whip from the ground, and, pointing angrily to the meat in the fire, shook the whip threateningly into Mrs. McNelly's face.

For an instant Mrs. McNelly faced the brute, her eyes flashing defiance. Then, as she thought of what the result of her defiance might be, not only to herself but to Kitty and the boys, she scornfully turned her back on the Mexican and returned to her meat and the fire, where Kitty, who had also started to run to the boys and had been rudely forced back, stood white and angry, looking as if she were about to fling herself upon the Mexican standing between her and Trav and Tom.

"Put the brakes on, Kitty. Put the brakes on your temper," Mrs. McNelly cautioned in a low voice, as she stooped to take the chunk of venison out of the coals. "'Twon't do a mite of good, but

stacks of harm, to get mad. The capture of the boys shows that Sam and Davy are on our trail. Shouldn't wonder if they'd even let themselves be caught on purpose, just to cheer us up and to let us know how near rescue is. Now, just show these dirty Greasers what sort of pluck and grit is in American girls. Our turn will come, never fear, when Sam and Davy—Ugh—”

One of the Mexicans at this moment had stepped up behind Mrs. McNelly, and roughly clapped a dirty brown hand over her mouth, which was polite Mexican for “Shut up,” an ugly grin on his face; but, with ludicrous suddenness, the grin became a spasm of pain, as, with a howl that could have been heard for half a mile, he jerked his hand away from Mrs. McNelly's mouth, and, seizing hold of the fingers with the other hand, began dancing up and down, howling with pain and cursing with rage.

“Then keep your dirty paw off my mouth,” and Mrs. McNelly straightened up with a jerk, and, whirling about, thrust the sizzling chunk of hot meat at the end of the stick she was holding to the fire into the Mexican's face.

With a yell the man leaped backward, but not until a goodly-sized drop of boiling hot grease had landed on the end of his nose, struck his heels against a cane stub, and went over backward, flat on his back, the richer by a couple of bitten fingers, a burnt nose, and a bad fall, for his encounter with Mrs. McNelly.



Mrs McNelly thrust the sizzling hot meat into the Mexican's face.

Fortunately for this strenuous advocate of patience, the other Mexicans had the saving grace of humor, and greeted the startling and ludicrous overthrow of their comrade with wild yells of laughter; and when he sprang to his feet, his face glowering with rage, and would have sprung upon Mrs. McNelly, they caught hold of him, and, pointing to his burnt nose and bleeding fingers and still screaming with laughter, pulled him back and held him. The scene had been too ludicrous to be spoilt now by any after brutality; and even a Mexican had sense enough to see this.

“There,” and Mrs. McNelly turned a bit crestfallen to Kitty, “you see what comes from losing one’s temper. I suppose I’ve made that man my mortal enemy for life; but I don’t believe he’ll ever put his dirty paw against my mouth again, and there’s some consolation in that,” and again Mrs. McNelly returned to her meat and the fire.

Trav and Tom had been intensely interested witnesses of this exciting scene; but, so suddenly had the denouement occurred, that it was all over and the Mexican sprawling on his back on the ground, before either lad really understood just what had happened. Both had started, even bound as they were, to rush to Mrs. McNelly’s assistance, but now, when they saw that all the Mexicans, except the victim, were making a huge joke out of the matter, they were only too glad to let well enough

alone, and made no further efforts for the present to reach Kitty and her mother.

“Si, señor,” and the smiling-faced Mexican, whose eyes had shifted to Mrs. McNelly during the excitement of the scene just described, again turned to Trav, “Andreas Vasquez not your prisoner now. You his prisoner. When he your prisoner, you laugh, call him coward, tree him like bear, insult the honor of his long-glorious name. But he fool American pigs—Pooh, so easy! He escape. The God of his fathers points out road to vengeance—the way to house of Big Sam McNelly, who kill his father and brother—crack skulls with bare fist. He go to house to capture wife and girl—pooh, so easy! Just throw blankets over heads when not looking and walk off with. American pigs so—so big fool. No got brains like cunning Mexican. American pigs try follow Mexican trail; but, again he fool, so easy. He hide in cane-brake, safe, while big pig and long pig go grunting by. Then come young pigs, and walk in Mexican trap, like fool rabbit; and he throw blankets over heads and capture—pooh, so easy! Now,” and the smile left his evil face and the poison-look came into his eyes, “Andreas Vasquez show big Sam McNelly, who crack Mexican skulls with bare fist, how long and deadly is arm of Mexican vengeance,” and the eyes that looked into Trav’s glittered like the eyes of a snake about to strike. “He, my good noble father, my brave brother, kill.

I, his wife, his girl, his boy, take. No kill; oh, no. Mexican vengeance too cunning. Make him suffer long. Make him suffer alone. Make wife and girl and boy suffer. Make all suffer. For skulls he crack, I crack hearts. Never, never—"His voice rose, his clenched hands gesticulated fiercely—"Never, never wife or girl or boy shall Big Sam McNelly again see. I, Andreas Vasquez, swear it."

For a moment the Mexican looked so fierce and threatening that Trav feared he was about to strike; but, in a minute, the violence of the gust of passion had swept over him, and, with a Mexican curse on all American pigs, he turned his back contemptuously on the boys, gave a few rapid commands in Spanish, and walked over to the fire, where Mrs. McNelly and Kitty were both busy getting food ready for their captors to eat.

Trav never answered a word to all that bombastic rigmarole so dramatically recited for his especial benefit by his melodramatic captor, Andreas Vasquez. He was wise enough to know that now was the time when silence was golden. But he had done a considerable bit of thinking; and his thoughts did not tend to salve in the least the hurts made by the boasts of his cunning captor. He, both boys, had been exceedingly foolish to allow themselves to be thus easily outwitted and captured just when their freedom was of the utmost importance; for it was evident that Davy Crockett

and Sam McNelly were on the wrong trail, and they, if they had only remained free, might have hurried on to them, told them of their discovery, and, probably, have been the means of the immediate rescue of Kitty and her mother and the capture of their abductors. But now, they, too, were prisoners, and the rescue of Kitty and her mother further away than ever. Trav saw all this clearly enough now, when too late; and, if ever a boy felt like kicking himself, that boy was Trav McNelly, as he thought of what might have been and of what was.

There were six men in addition to Andreas Vasquez, who was evidently their leader, in the little opening in the canebrake, and their horses stood, unsaddled and unbridled, quietly eating a little distance from Trav and Tom. Two of these men, at the commands of Vasquez, at once picked up their rifles and vanished in the canebrake. They were sent to bring in Trav's and Tom's horses, and again to close the opening to the passageway into the canebrake. Two of the remaining men approached a squirming bundle of blankets that had been thrown down near the boys, and began unwinding the rope with which it was fastened, grinning and roughly prodding the bundle as they did so.

Suddenly there was a vicious snarl, a tremendous squirming, and out from the bundle of blankets sprang Bing, his white teeth bared and every hair

on his body standing on end. Both of the Mexicans made a grab at him.

Snap! Snap! And Bing's white teeth were red; and the two Mexicans were swearing and reaching for their rifles, and Bing was racing for the opening in the canebrake, into which he vanished just as both rifles cracked.

"Bully for Bing!" Trav exclaimed; and, "Bully for Bing!" echoed Tom. "Never touched a hair of him," and his eyes turned joyfully to the two bleeding hands of the Mexicans.

Vasquez and the two other Mexicans came running up at this moment; and, when Vasquez learned what had happened, he turned upon the two unfortunate Mexicans, who had allowed Bing to escape and had fired off their rifles, so furiously, that, for a minute, Trav and Tom thought he would kill them both. But again the storm of his anger soon wore itself out; and, after vowing he would kill the next man who fired off a rifle without his order, he returned to the fire, leaving the two Mexicans to care for their bitten hands unaided, and to guard Trav and Tom.

By this time Mrs. McNelly and Kitty had the rude food ready; and Vasquez compelled them to serve him, and to wait upon his comrades; and not until he and his men had eaten all they wished, did he allow them to taste a mouthful. No food whatever was offered the two boys.

Kitty and her mother, their usefulness for the

night over, were now tightly bound, and left with one of the Mexicans to guard them on the side of the opening opposite the boys. Then Trav's and Tom's legs, in addition to their hands, were tied tightly together, and one of the remaining men ordered to keep a constant eye on them on pain of instant death should they escape. Evidently Vasquez, in spite of his scornful words, had a wholesome regard for the prowess of his prisoners, and intended to guard against all possibilities of their escape, by keeping them, even when bound, under constant surveillance. When this had been done to the satisfaction of the watchful eyes of the chief, he, and the two Mexicans who were not on guard, at once laid themselves down on their blankets and were soon sound asleep.

Trav and Tom were so thoroughly tired out and sleepy—it will be remembered that it was now long after midnight and that both boys had had an intensely active as well as exciting time of it since the bear-hunt began in the early morning—that, in spite of their bonds and the hardness of the unprotected ground beneath them, they were both asleep almost as soon as they were allowed to stretch themselves out on the ground, nor did they awaken again until aroused the next morning by the prodding toe of one of the Mexicans.

The sun was now up and shining down brightly on the little clearing in the canebrake; and its rays lighted a scene so quiet and apparently peaceful,

that, for a moment, it was difficult for the two boys to realize the actual condition of affairs.

Kitty and her mother were busy about the camp-fire getting breakfast. Vasquez and three of his men sat placidly smoking near by. Two of the other men still lay on their blankets asleep. The remaining Mexican, his rifle held across his knees, sat a few feet from the boys, tranquilly smoking and occasionally glancing in their direction. The horses—and, with a start, Trav and Tom recognized the horses they had ridden among them—stood quietly eating a few rods away. Circling around them the tall canes rose on every side to the height of twenty or more feet, an impassable wall of green except where pathways had been made through it. Such was the quiet and peaceful-looking scene on which the eyes of the boys rested, as they rose stiff and sore to their feet; but they were not permitted to contemplate it long undisturbed.

Vasquez glanced in their direction, and quickly gave an order.

The man sitting near the boys arose, and at once began untying their hands.

“Thank you, Mexico. You never did a better deed in your life,” and Trav stretched his stiffened arms and grunted with relief the moment his swollen wrists were free.

As soon as the arms of the boys were freed, the Mexican stooped and began unloosing their feet.

“Sure, and I will remember you in my will for this, Mexico,” and Tom swung his arms and kicked first with one foot, then with the other, in an effort to get the blood again circulating properly through his limbs.

But the boys were not left long to ponder over the cause of this unexpected kindness on the part of their captors; for, hardly had they had time to kick the kinks out of their stiffened legs, when Vasquez ordered them to be hobbled, and to bring grass for the horses, and wood for the camp-fire. The hobbling was done by tying a short rope around their ankles in such a way that it permitted them to take a step only about a foot long. This, of course, made running or even fast walking impossible while the rope was around their legs, and prevented them from even attempting to escape by running away.

“Hobbled like a couple of horses!” Trav said indignantly, his face flushing, and for a moment he looked as if he were about to rebel.

Vasquez saw the look, and, quickly jumping to his feet, he caught up a horsewhip, and walked swiftly to where the boys stood, the look of rebellion growing on their faces, and their eyes beginning to glint angrily.

“Dare the American pigs not to obey my commands?” and he raised the whip threateningly above Trav’s shoulders. “If so, I whip like dogs. Si, señors, I whip like dogs. Now, go get grass and

wood, or," and the whip hung quivering in the air.

"You dirty coward!" and Trav's fists were clenched tightly. "You dirty coward, don't you dare to strike—"

"Trav!" and Mrs. McNelly's voice rang out appealingly, warningly.

Trav's fists instantly unclosed. For the moment he had forgotten his mother and Kitty; and how for their sakes, as well as his own, he must endure quietly such indignities as the Mexicans cared to impose upon him.

"All right, mother," he called back, his lips closing tightly. "I'll try and make the best of a mighty bad bargain; but, if ever— Oh, what's the use of kicking? You've got the strangle hold just now, Mexico, and we'll do whatever you tell us to, so long as it is anything fit for American boys to do."

Vasquez grinned triumphantly, and lowered his whip.

"I thought American pigs no like whip," he said. "Whip make squeal, like pig," and his wicked black eyes glittered. "You now my servants, same as dog and horse," he continued; "and, like dog and horse, I whip when not do what I want. Now, go get grass and wood," and, turning to the men sitting by the fire, he ordered two of them to guard the boys while they were doing the camp-work.

The two men at once picked up their rifles, and, falling in behind Trav and Tom, indicated that they

were ready to start by jabbing the boys in the backs with the muzzles of their guns, which was polite Mexican for, "Get a move on you."

The boys were conducted through a narrow passageway in the canebrake to the banks of a small stream of water. Here, along the shores of the stream, grew little patches of grass and a few stunted trees. Their guards now handed each boy a hunting-knife, and bade him get to work cutting grass. When sufficient grass had been cut, they tied it up in bundles and carried it on their backs to the horses. Then they gathered bundles of firewood, and bore them on their backs to the campfire.

This, hobbled as they were, was exceedingly slow and laborious work; but they were not allowed to stop, nor were they given a mouthful to eat, until their tasks were completed, which was not accomplished until the sun was nearing the zenith.

Kitty and her mother watched the toiling boys with pitying eyes; but Vasquez, seemingly out of pure cruelty, would not allow a word to pass between them and Trav and Tom; and both sighed with relief, when, at last, they saw that the boys were allowed to stop and were given something to eat.

Evidently the Mexicans had no intentions of continuing their journey that day. If they waited until night, their pursuers would be at least a day's journey ahead of them, which is a desirable place for

pursuers to be, while their present hiding-place had been chosen and concealed so cunningly that there was not one chance out of a thousand of its being discovered. Then, again, by traveling at night and lying hidden in some secure place of concealment during the daylight, until they were out of the enemy's country, there would be little chance of their being seen by any wandering white hunter or traveler, all of whom would soon know of the capture of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and the two boys by the Mexicans, and be on the lookout for the abductors. Such, at least, was the reasoning of Andreas Vasquez, who had the cunning of the fox coupled with the cruelty and cowardice of the wolf; and the results proved the wisdom of his planning.

That night, as soon as it became dark, the horses were saddled, and, very cautiously, the little cavalcade made its way out of the canebrake, the prisoners tightly bound and guarded on the backs of two of the horses; and, as swiftly as the darkness would permit, fled westward. All that night, with hardly a pause, they hurried on; but, as soon as it began to grow light, Vasquez led the way into another canebrake, where a hiding-place similar to the one already described had been prepared, and again camped for the day, and again Trav and Tom were compelled to do all the camp-work, while Mrs. McNelly and Kitty attended to the meals, and the Mexicans slept and smoked or idly talked, reclining lazily on their blankets.

Thus for five days and nights the Mexicans fled westward, each day hiding in some secluded wood or canebrake, and each night hurrying on toward the Mexican towns to the west, but at best going but slowly, on account of the darkness and the detours they were obliged to make in order to avoid the American settlements.

During all this time the boys had been forbidden to speak to or even to go near Mrs. McNelly and Kitty; and, so carefully had they been guarded and kept separated from the other prisoners that not once had they had an opportunity to disobey this cruel order. However, it was so great a consolation to be always near enough to Kitty and her mother to know that they were safe, that it almost reconciled them to their own captivity and its many hardships.

But, what had become of Davy Crockett and Sam McNelly? and why had they not come to their rescue? Again and again Trav and Tom had asked each other these questions, during these long weary five days of captivity; and, as often, they had been forced to the conclusion that the cunning Mexicans had succeeded in completely outwitting the famous bear-hunter and the giant settler; and, as day after day had passed without a sign from their rescuers, and as every day brought them nearer to the Mexican settlements, so each day their hope of rescue had grown less and less, until now, as they halted to camp on this morning of the sixth day, both boys

were pretty nearly discouraged—not that they had lost faith for an instant in Davy Crockett and Sam McNelly. Both boys knew that neither Davy nor Sam would give up the hunt, as long as he had life and a hope of their rescue remained; but, how could they find them now, after five days of journeying in that measureless wilderness?

“I—I am afraid Kitty and her mother will have to depend on us, Trav, to get them out of the clutches of these brutes,” Tom said, as, after the morning’s camp-work had been done, he sank down, almost completely exhausted, by the side of Trav. “Davy and your father must have lost the trail at Canebrake Creek and never found it again; and no wonder, for who’d have thought a Greaser would be sharp enough to do as Vasquez did. And we must get away, if possible, before we get to San Antonio, where, probably, Vasquez has plenty of friends to help him hide and guard us.”

“That’s all true enough,” answered Trav, gloomily. “But I’d like to know how we’re going to get away, when we can’t wiggle a toe night or day without a Mexican being on hand to see that there is nothing suspicious in the wiggle, much less how we’re going to take Kitty and mother with us. I am sure I’ve tried to think of some way until my thinker is about worn out; but, as long as Vasquez keeps us hobbled like horses and an armed guard over us night and day, I don’t see how even Davy Crockett himself could get away,” and he glowered

furiously at the guard who sat, rifle across his knees, not a dozen feet away. "But, as Davy Crockett would say, we must never say dead until our goose is cooked— Hello, what's doing now?" and a look of hope sprang into the faces of both boys, as they quickly jumped to their feet.

At that moment, one of the Mexicans stationed a little distance away had uttered a low warning cry; and instantly Vasquez and his men had seized their rifles and sprang to their feet, and now stood staring anxiously and fearfully toward the part of the surrounding woods, whence all could plainly hear a sound like that made by a number of horses or other large animals forcing their way through thick underbrush.

Vasquez gave a low command, and one of the men glided swiftly into the woods and disappeared in the direction of the sound.

Five anxious minutes passed—anxious to the prisoners as well as to their captors, for who could tell whether friends or enemies were approaching?—then a shout was heard, and a few minutes later the man who had been dispatched to find out the cause of the noise, came running back into camp, his eyes sparkling with excitement, and shouted out something in Spanish.

CHAPTER VIII

A STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

TRAV'S and Tom's hopes vanished instantly at sight of the reception Vasquez and his men gave to the news brought by their comrades; for, since their countenances and actions showed only joy, it was evidently very good news to them, and it was equally evident that, if it were good news to them, it could not be otherwise than bad news to the two boys.

"Who can it be?" and Trav glanced anxiously in the direction of the approaching sound. "I hope it in no more Mexicans for mother and Kitty to wait on. They're about tuckered out as it is; and Kitty is beginning to show it terribly. She's getting thin and white, and looks as if she were sick, but she's got grit and won't give up until she has to. I don't know what would happen, if mother or Kitty should get sick," and he looked gloomily over to where Mrs. McNelly and Kitty stood, on the other side of the camp-fire.

"Well, it is more Mexicans!" Tom exclaimed angrily, as six men rode into view, their horses and equipments showing long and hard service. "And Mexican soldiers at that!" and he glared furiously

at the horsemen, who now had reached camp, and were literally received with open arms by Vasquez and his men.

For a few minutes there was the liveliest kind of jabbering and exclaiming and gesticulating among the Mexicans; and when Vasquez threw his hat up into the air and shouted jubilantly: "*Viva, Santa Anna el Illustrissimo! Viva, el Presidente General Santa Anna!*" and all the others threw their hats up and cheered for El General Santa Anna.

"Santa Anna! What are the beggars cheering Santa Anna for? You—you don't suppose—it can't be," and Trav's face whitened. "It can't be that Santa Anna and his army have at last reached Texas, and that these soldiers are from his army?"

"Looks like it," Tom answered disconsolately. "But we'll soon know, for here comes Vasquez; and he couldn't keep that Mexican tongue of his from boasting about it, if anything like that has happened, to save his dirty neck from the hanging it deserves. Well, what's up now?" and he turned a scowling face to his captor, whose lips were smiling and whose eyes were sparkling with vindictive triumph. "You've been making noise enough to scare all the wolves out of Texas."

"Ai, noise to frighten all pigs, American pigs, in Texas. We did but shout the name of his Excelentísimo Presidente, El General Santa Anna, and all Texas trembled," and Vasquez waved both arms grandiloquently. "What then will happen when

this not conquerable general rides into Texas at head of great army? Ai, what then?" and he gesticulated excitedly. "He will make red the ground of Texas with blood of American pigs. Like stampeding buffalo he across the Sabine will drive them, grunting and squealing. Now will Mexicans rule American pigs; keep in pens, like other pigs; make work like horse and dog. And I," and the snake-look glittered in his eyes, "I Big Sam McNelly, who crack Mexican skulls with bare fists, his wife, his girl, his boy will make my slaves, will make do what I tell, or whip, whip like dog or horse; and Big Sam McNelly shall know, but no can help, no can save, no can rescue. Make him suffer long, long he live. Make you suffer long, long you live. Make wife and girl suffer long, long they live. Make all suffer. No kill; oh, no. That American pig vengeance, not Mexican. Make suffer long as live, that Mexican vengeance."

As he spoke Vasquez strutted up and down in front of the boys, like a veritable villain of a melodrama, his dark eyes flashing, his long arms gesticulating, and his white teeth gleaming beneath his black mustache; but, unfortunately for Trav and Tom, this was no stage performance of a fictitious melodrama. The villain was real, as large as life, and worst of all, he had the power to do exactly what he threatened to do, unless the boys and Mrs. McNelly and Kitty escaped, and escape now seemed more impossible than ever. Consequently Trav

and Tom did not enjoy this melodramatic display of Mexican hatred and passion, as much as they might have done had they themselves not been the principal dramatis personæ. However both boys had too much sense to answer the Mexican's bombastic boasting, although each lad's tongue fairly itched to tell him exactly what he thought of him and of the whole Mexican army, including Santa Anna and all his generals. They stood silent, but their faces plainly showed their wrath and contempt.

Suddenly Vasquez appeared to recollect himself, and stopped short directly in front of the lads.

"But I waste much talk on American pigs," he said contemptuously. "Go," and he pointed peremptorily toward the horses of the Mexican soldiers, "care for horses. Go!" and, turning to their guard, he spoke a few words rapidly to him.

The man grinned, and, springing behind the boys, began prodding them toward the horses with the muzzle of his rifle.

The boys were still hobbled, and the Mexican's prods were so violent, that more than once in going the short distance to the horses both boys were tumbled to the ground. This appeared to amuse the soldiers immensely, for every time the lads fell they shouted and laughed and yelled their approval to the guard, who, thus encouraged, redoubled his muzzle-jabbing, with the result that the backs of both boys were black and blue by the time the horses were reached. But a sight of the pitying face of

Mrs. McNelly and the tears in Kitty's eyes and the thought of what might happen should they rebel, made each lad grit his teeth together and bear the pain and the indignities without a murmur; and they were as wise as they were brave in doing this, for Andreas Vasquez would have liked nothing better than to have been obliged to force them to obey him with the whip-lash.

Trav and Tom learned that the Mexican soldiers were a part of the advance scouts, sent out by Santa Anna a week ahead of the marching of the army, in order that the Mexicans in Texas might know of his coming and be prepared to aid him and his army. The soldiers were on their way to San Antonio de Bexar; and, as Vasquez was also going to the same place, it did not take them long to agree to travel together.

"Governor Smith and General Houston and Austin ought to know of the coming of Santa Anna and his army right away," Trav whispered to Tom, the moment their work was done, and they were again allowed to seat themselves.

"Sure," Tom answered sarcastically. "You might mount your good horse and start right off with the news. Of course your feet are hobbled together, as if you were a horse, and a Mexican with a loaded rifle in his hands and a long knife in his belt stands guard over you about ten feet away, and a dozen other Mexicans, including six of Santa Anna's brave soldiers, all armed with loaded rifles

and pistols and knives, are standing about keeping an eye on you; but don't let little things like those stop you. Just leap onto the back of your good horse, and away with the news of the coming of Santa Anna to General Houston—Oh, but I've stood about all of this sort of thing I can," and Tom gritted his teeth and dug his heel viciously into the ground. "If it hadn't been for Kitty and her mother I'd—I'd taken my chances, and jumped on that Greaser, while he was prodding us with his gun, and thumped him one on the nose and smashed in his eyes, if they had killed me for it the next minute. I'll bet there isn't a spot as big as a pin's head on my back that he didn't jab his gun into," and he glared at the Mexican guard, who grinned and rubbed his back suggestively.

"And I'd have jumped with you," Trav declared emphatically, glowering at the grinning guard. "But, what's the use? We've just got to grin and bear it, for Kitty's and mother's sakes, and for our own, too, I guess. I fancy what we've had is nothing to what we'd get, if we rebelled. But I do wish there was some way of letting General Houston know that Santa Anna and his army are probably even now across the Rio Grande, and hurrying on, hoping to pounce down upon us and take some stronghold of ours by surprise; but, what can a fellow do when there's a loaded rifle with a man back of it always at his elbow, and plenty more always near to help?"

"Grumble, we can grumble," Tom broke in, his face flushing slightly. "And grumbling, you know, will do us such a sight of good."

"Well, I'd like to know if you haven't done your share of grumbling," and for an instant Trav's face flushed angrily.

"Certain. More than my share," Tom answered cheerfully. "But 'tain't done me a mite of good, and keeps me riled up all the time; and so I'm going to try and cut the grumble out after this. Want to join me in the try? Vasquez will be a splendid test," and he smiled bravely.

"Sure," and Trav, the anger all gone from his face, reached out and caught Tom by the hand. "And I guess you haven't grumbled any more than I have. But it's mighty hard to see mother and Kitty suffering all the time, to see them treated like dogs, and to be treated like dogs ourselves, and not get mad, and let the mad out in words and acts. But you are right. It don't do a mite of good. Only makes things worse. And then, if we ever get the start of Vasquez, we've got to fool him into thinking that we've lost all our pluck and courage, and haven't got enough gump left to try to get away. He'll watch us closer than a cat does a mouse, so long as we show any spunk; and I think it will be a good way to fool him to cut all the grumble out after this, and to act just as if he had knocked all the grit out of us, and hadn't left enough spunk in us for us to even want to try to get away.

Maybe then he'll get a little careless and give us a chance; and, if he does—" and Trav's jaws came together with a click—"we'll take it quicker than lightning."

"You bet we will," and Tom's eyes flamed; "so quick he won't know what has happened until we're gone. And, if I ever get a chance, I'll give Vasquez a dose of his own medicine that will make him sick to the stomach. Oh, but I am tired, and sore, and sleepy! I'm sure every bone in my body has an ache in it; and I feel as if I had not had more than a wink of sleep in a week. I've just got to go to sleep," and, wearied almost beyond endurance, the tired boy stretched himself out on the hard unblanketed ground.

"Same here," and Trav lay down by his comrade's side; and almost instantly both boys had passed into the land of dreams, where there were no vengeful Vasquez and his brutal Mexicans.

When the boys awoke it was already growing dark; but, to their surprise, no preparations were being made to continue the journey during the darkness of the night. Vasquez and the Mexican soldiers sat smoking and chatting around the blazing camp-fire. A few feet from Trav and Tom stood their inevitable guard. On the other side of the fire, her back against the trunk of a tree, sat Mrs. McNelly, with Kitty's head lying in her lap. When she saw that the boys were awake she nodded her head to them and smiled. A few feet from Mrs.

McNelly and Kitty stood another Mexican, their guard. Two others of Vasquez's men, who were not in sight, were guarding the little encampment. All the rest of the men were reclining on their blankets around the camp-fire, in the various attitudes dear to their lazy, ease-loving bodies.

"Looks as if there was to be no traveling to-night," Trav said, after he had glanced around at this peaceful and inactive looking scene, "and I'm mighty glad of it. The long rest will do us all a sight of good, and be better than medicine for Kitty, poor girl! Besides," and he lowered his voice, "maybe it will give Davy and father a chance to catch up with us, if they are on our trail."

Trav was right. There was to be no traveling done that night. Vasquez now felt that he had so completely outwitted his pursuers and was so far from the American settlements, that there was no longer any need of hiding during the daylight and traveling only at night. Besides, had he not now the brave soldiers of Santa Anna to protect him and to help guard the prisoners? He had yet to learn the relentless courage and perseverance of an aroused Anglo-American backwoodsman.

That night the boys' hands and feet were strongly bound and a guard stationed over them, before they were allowed to go to sleep. Mrs. McNelly and Kitty were also bound and guarded. Vasquez himself, before lying down for the night, came and carefully examined the buckskin thongs, with which

the hands and feet of Trav and Tom were tied.

"I make sure American pigs no get away from my right vengeance," he said, as he tightened the thongs around Trav's ankles. "How free American pigs like being Mexican's slaves?" he inquired sarcastically, as he paused a moment later to gloat over his captives, after having satisfied himself that their bonds were secure, his evil face smiling down at the two boys.

"O, go away and don't bother us," muttered Trav dully. "All we want now is to be let alone so that we can sleep, sleep," he repeated drowsily; and even when Vasquez kicked him, by way of saying good night, he only groaned and shrank shiveringly away.

Vasquez returned to his blanket chuckling to himself, for he fancied that at last he had broken the tough fiber of the two American boys' spirit. But again the Mexican had misjudged the courage and grit of the Anglo-American.

For a couple of hours the two boys lay almost motionless. Then Trav turned cautiously, so that he faced Tom. Their mouths were now only about three feet apart, and each lad could hear even a low whisper when uttered by the other. Their guard sat a dozen feet away, his back against the trunk of a tree and his head nodding drowsily. The camp-fire had burned low, and the night was just dark enough to make an object a couple of rods distant look indistinct and shadowy.

"Tom," softly whispered Trav. "Tom, are you awake?"

"Yes, what is it?" came back the answer so softly whispered that it could not have been heard six feet away.

"Slowly turn over so that your back will be towards me. I am going to see if I can't bite in two one of the thongs of deerskin that bind your wrists together." (The boys' hands had been tied behind their backs.) "Now turn slowly, and be careful not to make a mite of noise," and Trav glanced anxiously toward the guard, whose chin now rested on his breast. "The guard is asleep. Do you understand?"

"Yes—All right—O, if you only can!" and Tom's whisper was vibrant with hope. "Keep your eyes on the guard and tell me if he wakes up," and slowly, so slowly that to the anxiously waiting Trav he seemed hardly to move at all, Tom began cautiously turning over. Five minutes later he lay with his back to Trav, and the guard still slumbered.

"Now you keep watch of the guard," Trav whispered, "and let me know, if he shows any signs of waking up," and then he began slowly and with the utmost caution working his head up to Tom's bound hands.

Another five minutes passed—hours it seemed to the excited boys—and Trav's mouth had reached the thongs of deerskin.

“Hold your hands as close together as possible,” Trav whispered, “so as to loosen the cords. I’m going to begin to bite,” and, after a minute’s struggle, he managed to get a strand of the tightly-drawn deerskin between his strong white teeth. Then he began to chew and bite with all the strength of his vigorous young jaws.

The position in which Trav was obliged to lie while chewing was an extremely difficult one to hold, and he was compelled to pause every three or four minutes to rest; but, after half an hour of effort, he felt the strong thong of deerskin giving, and, in another minute, the thong broke between his teeth.

“Pull your hands apart! Pull your hands apart!” he whispered excitedly. “I’ve chewed the thong in two. Pull your hands apart!”

Tom at once began jerking and twitching his arms, and, in a few moments, the broken thong of deerskin fell from his wrists and his hands were free.

“Now,” and Tom’s voice trembled with excitement, “turn your back to me and I will untie your hands, Trav.”

The guard still slept, his chin on his breast, his arms hanging down by his sides, his rifle fallen into his lap, utterly unconscious of what was going on around him.

For a moment both boys lay still, their eyes on the guard; and then, as he still appeared to be

sleeping soundly, they both began slowly and noiselessly turning over, so as to give Tom a chance to untie Trav's hands.

The knots were very strongly drawn, and it was fully ten minutes before the trembling fingers of the excited boy could untie them.

"Now for our feet," Trav whispered. "I'll untie yours first," and, still lying down, he crawled to where he could get his fingers on the thongs around Tom's ankles, and soon had them free.

Five minutes later both boys lay side by side, with arms and legs free, breathing heavily, their eyes on the guard.

If he would only continue to sleep on!

They must formulate some plan of action before they arose to their feet.

"What shall we do about Kitty and her mother?" Tom whispered, his heart pounding against his ribs. "Shall we try to take them with us?"

"We cannot, we dare not, it would be impossible for any of us to escape, if we did. We must leave them," and Trav's voice choked, "until we can find Davy and father, and then we'll hurry back to their rescue. Mother will understand. She will know that we have not deserted her and Kitty. Are you ready, Tom?—But, wait. We must have guns and powder and ball. We would starve in this wilderness without them, and we must have something to defend ourselves with. Lie quiet, and I will take a look around, and see if they have left any of their

guns within our reach," and very cautiously Trav rose to a sitting posture, keeping an anxious eye on the sleeping guard, and glanced around the camp.

A couple of rods from the boys and within six feet of where Vasquez and two of his men lay sleeping, three rifles, with their powder-horns and bullet-pouches, stood leaning against a tree, and, with a thrill of delight, Trav recognized two of these guns as the rifles that had been taken from Tom and him.

"Our own rifles," he whispered excitedly to Tom, crouching down by his side, "are standing up against a tree, right near where Vasquez is sleeping. We must try to get them. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes," and Tom began cautiously rising to his feet.

For a minute after reaching their feet, both boys stood silent, hardly daring to breathe, their eyes searching swiftly the surrounding camp and turning anxiously to the guard, who still slept, his chin on his breast. They could hear his deep, regular breathing.

"Not a soul is awake. Now is our time," whispered Trav excitedly. "Come on. We will get the guns," and, as cautiously and as noiselessly as two Indians, they moved slowly toward the tree against which the three guns were leaning, their eyes flashing swift glances about them in every

direction and their ears keenly alert to catch every sound.

Not one of the sleepers moved. Vasquez lay with his face toward them. The dim red light of the camp-fire shone on his features and lighted them indistinctly. Both boys shuddered when they looked on that hated countenance, villainous and brutal even in the repose of sleep.

What if he should awake!

They reached the tree, and for a brief instant stood trembling within six feet of the head of Vasquez. The slightest noise—the rattle of a gun barrel against the bark of the tree, the snapping of a twig underneath their feet—might awake him. There must be no noise. Each lad glanced into the eyes of the other, and each drank in courage from that glance. Then, with hands that no longer trembled, the fingers of each boy closed round the barrel of his own gun and noiselessly slipped powder-horn and bullet-pouch over his shoulder.

The camp had been made in a little glade in a woods. On one side of this glade the underbrush grew thick. Trav now pointed to the underbrush; and both boys, holding their rifles in their hands and stepping as softly as cats, started toward the spot where the brush grew thickest.

But, fortune at best is a fickle goddess. She holds the desired object almost within our grasp; then, just as our fingers are about to close around

it, she suddenly jerks it away and leaves us to our fate.

Thus it was with Trav and Tom. They had escaped the vigilance of the guard, they had freed their hands and feet, they had secured their guns, they had started for the safety of the underbrush, then, when they had almost won their freedom, the fickle goddess deserted them.

At the second step from the tree Trav's right foot suddenly went down into a hole dug by some large burrowing animal; and boy and rifle fell with a clatter to the ground. A glance over his shoulder, as he struggled to his feet, showed Vasquez already springing up from his blanket, while at the same moment, his yell of alarm rang out through the camp.

"Run, run for your life! Run!" Trav shouted to Tom, as he jerked his foot out of the hole and attempted to regain his feet.

But the brave lad had no thought of deserting his comrade, and, turning quickly, he caught hold of Trav's shoulders and pulled him to his feet.

"Quick, to the brush!" he whispered. "The way is clear," and started on the run for the underbrush.

As Trav sprang after Tom Vasquez, upraised knife in his hand, was not six feet behind. Another leap and the Mexican would sheath the knife in the boy's back.

But Trav saw his danger; and, with the nimbleness of a deer, jumped to one side just as Vasquez

sprang, and, before the Mexican could turn or leap out of his way, he swung his rifle above his head and brought its heavy butt down on the skull of his enemy, with a thud that sent the man to the ground like a dropped log. Then he leaped after Tom.

Tremendous now was the excitement in camp. Rifles flashed and banged like an exploding bunch of firecrackers, Mexicans yelled and swore, and above all the fleeing boys heard the screams of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty.

In the edge of the underbrush stood two large trees about six feet apart. With yells of triumph both boys sprang between these trees, and leaped toward the underbrush. But, even as they yelled, there came to each lad a blinding crash of light, instantly followed by black nothingness; and the two boys lay senseless at the feet of two of the camp sentinels, who had stood hidden behind the two trees, and struck the boys down with the butts of their rifles, as they sprang between them.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOOTING OF THE OWLS

WHEN consciousness returned to Trav and Tom, they lay a few feet from the camp-fire, which was now blazing brightly, staked out on the hard ground spread-eagle fashion. That is to say, they had been laid flat on their backs on the ground, their arms and legs spread as wide apart as possible, and then a stake had been driven deep into the ground by the side of each hand and foot, and the hand and foot firmly tied to it with thongs of deer-skin. The Mexicans stood around them in a circle, jabbering and gesticulating excitedly. For a minute or two their brains throbbed and whirled so violently, that all the dark and scowling faces and black flashing eyes appeared to be dancing and whirling around them in the most grotesque and confusing fashion; and then their brains cleared and they could see distinctly.

Directly in front of them stood Vasquez, a bloody bandage tied around his head, and a villainous glitter in his snake-like eyes. Trav, even in his present condition, felt a thrill of keenest satisfaction when he saw that bandage and remembered that it

was his own hands that had made its application necessary.

The eyes of Vasquez were on the faces of the two boys, and when he saw that they were again conscious, he gave Trav a kick in the ribs with the toe of his boot, which was polite Mexican for, "I am going to speak. Please pay attention."

"Son of Big Sam McNelly, who crack skulls of Mexicans with bare fist," he began, "you think you fool Vasquez. You think you escape his right vengeance. No, he too cunning for American pigs. You no escape, never. I no kill, not even for this," and he touched the bandage around his head, while a gleam of venom shot from his eyes. "No, I not kill; but I whip, whip, whip," his voice rose into a scream, "whip till the blood run, till back is like raw meat, till American pigs squeal for mercy, but no get mercy. I—I—"

Here his wrath fairly choked him, and he shrieked and spluttered and gesticulated for a few minutes longer; and then, as suddenly as it came, the heat of his anger cooled, and, turning to his men, he gave a command in Spanish.

The men grinned, as if the command had a pleasing sound in their ears, and then two of them quickly approached Trav, and, cutting the thongs of deerskin that bound his hands and feet to the four stakes, jerked him to his feet and led him to a tree about a foot in diameter, which stood a little distance away but where the bright light of the

camp-fire shone full upon it. Here they jerked off his coat and shirt, making him bare to the waist, thrust him, face first, tight up against the tree, and, each catching hold of an arm, they both pulled them back and around the tree and tied the hands firmly together, thus leaving his naked back ready for the cutting lash of the whip.

Vasquez picked up a heavy rawhide whip, and strode to the tree where Trav was bound. The other Mexicans all circled around him, their eyes gleaming wolfish in the firelight. Mrs. McNelly sat, with white face and tightly compressed lips, her eyes glowing like two coals of fire. She did not beg for mercy for her boy. She knew that begging would be useless, and she would not give the hated Mexican the satisfaction of seeing her weep and beg; but her mother-heart was wrung by the agony of the thought of what Trav must suffer. Kitty was not as stoical. She was sobbing violently, her face hidden in her mother's lap. She could not bear to see the whip cut the white flesh of her brother. Tom gritted his teeth together, glared at Vasquez, and threatened him with all kinds of dreadful punishments, if he but dared to lay the lash of his whip once across Trav's back.

"Your turn come next," and Vasquez smiled down on the raging boy. "No talk so much with tongue. Save tongue to yell when whip cutting own back. Now see how Mexican whip American pig," and he swung the whip above Trav's back.

At this moment the mournful hoot of an owl sounded from the woods to the right, and was quickly answered by a hoot coming from the woods to the left.

Vasquez paused, the whip suspended in the air, to taunt his victim.

“Ha! Ha!” he laughed. “Now I make American pig squeal—wee! wee! Now I make American blood run, like blood of dog. Now my father, my brother, smile in his grave, and say Vasquez he good son, good brother, he revenge. Now, now I strike!” and, rising on his toes, he brought the heavy whip down with all his strength on the bare back of Trav.

Even as the whip struck the hoot of another owl sounded from the woods to the back, and was quickly answered by a hoot from the woods to the front.

Again Vasquez swung the whip above his head; but, before the lash could fall, the sharp bang of a rifle broke through the surrounding silence, and the arm that held the whip fell, shattered by a rifle ball.

The next instant it seemed to the startled Mexicans as if rifles were cracking all around them; and, from the yells that sounded in their ears, they were sure that at least a regiment was charging down upon them. This was more than Mexican flesh and blood were made to stand, and, with wild cries of terror, every man, who had not been hit by the

flying bullets, fled, not stopping even to pick up a rifle or other weapon, only anxious to get out of reach of the deadly bullets and strong arms of the terrible Americans as quickly as possible; and in less time than it has taken to tell it, not one of the Mexicans able to run was in sight.

Trav, during all this excitement of yelling men, cracking rifles, and screeching Mexicans, had been struggling desperately to release himself from his bonds, so as to take a part in the rescue that he knew was being made; but, twist and squirm and jerk and pull as he might, he could not free his hands from the strong thongs that bound his arms around the tree. Then, suddenly, a tall form darted by his side, and the next instant the thongs of deer-skin fell from his wrists, cut by the keen blade of a knife, and he staggered back from the tree.

“Great bobcats, if ’tain’t Trav McNelly!” and the long arms of Davy Crockett were around Trav before the boy had fairly recovered his equilibrium. “If I’d a knowed it was your hide that Greaser was a-trying to cut red ribbons out of, I’d just told Betsey to speak her little word before the first blow fell; but we wanted every man to be in his place before we let loose.”

“But—but, where are the Mexicans?” queried Trav, struggling from Davy’s arms and looking anxiously around.

“Scratching hide and kicking gravel,” chuckled Crockett, “as fast as their legs can take them

through the brush, all that can run. Scared worse than a flock of squawking geese. Reckon they thought General Sam and the whole Texan army were a-charging down upon them like a steamboat a-fire," and he chuckled again. "Every mother's son of them broke for the woods like a gang of stampeding steers the moment we began to shoot and yell. But," and his eyes turned quickly to a little scene that was being enacted the other side of the camp-fire, "I see Sam's a-getting more than his share of hugs and kisses. Come on. Let's bust the monopoly," and he hurried to where Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and Big Sam McNelly stood locked in one another's arms.

Trav paused only long enough to throw on his shirt and coat, and then hastened to the rejoicing group around Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and Tom, who had been freed by his father, who was one of the rescuers.

For ten minutes at least Big Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett and Jonas Gifford and the two boys and Kitty and her mother were the happiest human beings in all Texas. Like her namesake, Kitty snuggled up in her father's great arms, and lay with her soft cheek nestled warmly against his rough bearded one, her arms around his neck, too happy and contented in that safe haven of refuge to care to do or say anything, only just to lie there and smile happily at all the others. But the others! How they shook one another's hands, and talked,

and laughed, yes, and cried a little—tears of joy—not one of my readers needs, I am sure, to be told, for the heart of each will picture to himself that joyous reunion, under such dramatic circumstances, better than any words of mine can.

Davy Crockett was the first to recall the fact that they were not yet “out of the woods,” as he put it, and that they had better leave the telling of their stories until they had found a safer place.

“Not that I reckon any of them Greasers we scared will be coming back,” he said, chuckling and grinning. “Nothing short of Santa Anna and the whole Mexican army could stop them; but, with all our yelling and shooting and the screeching of the Mexicans, this particular spot has been too well advertised for our safety. Supposing some of them Mexican soldiers that we know are roaming hereabouts heard the rumpus, and started out to investigate. Now, I reckon, it would be safer for us to be somewhere else during that investigation, as the fleas said, as they made quick jumps for their lives, when the Scotchman tumbled into a vat of boiling oil; and we’d better make a quick jump away from here.”

This was too good advice to be neglected; and, for the present, the stories of their various adventures, since that fatal day of the great bear-hunt, were postponed until they could be told where there was less likelihood of interruption.

Now, for the first time since their rescue, the

boys had eyes for others than Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and Sam and Davy and Jonas Gifford, and glanced around, expecting to see at least half a dozen of the stalwart men of their section of country standing near, leaning on their long-barreled rifles; but they saw only one man, and he a stranger, bending over one of the wounded Mexicans.

"Why, Davy, where are the rest of your men?" and Trav turned inquiringly to Crockett.

"There ain't no rest. We four did it all with our little mouths and guns," laughed Davy Crockett.

"But there were thirteen Mexicans, and six of them were soldiers right from Santa Anna's army, and they all ran without so much as firing a gun!" and the astonished boy stared around, as if he could hardly believe the evidences of his own eyes.

"You bet they ran," grinned Crockett, "a-squealing worse than the pig did when the devil turned barber, all excepting those our rifles told to stop and lie down. Now, I wonder," and his face hardened, "if we got that ornery skin full of poison that's responsible for all this trouble. I know Betsey knocked a hole through his whip-arm, and I reckoned on capturing the skunk alive; but, somehow, during the scrimmage I lost sight of him. Hope one of the other men finished the job. I'm going to find out," and he started toward the spot where three of the Mexicans lay dead on the ground, the result of that fatal first rifle volley, and two others,

badly wounded, sat propped up against trees, alternately groaning and begging for mercy.

Crockett first examined the three dead men. Vasquez was not among them. Then he gave his attention to the two wounded Mexicans. Again he was doomed to disappointment.

“Seen anything of that bunch of Mexican poison that was holding the whip over the back of a free-born American, Bill?” and Crockett turned to the stranger, who stood near, watching him curiously as he examined the bodies.

“Certain,” answered Bill, grinning. “He led the procession; and was a-going like a young steamboat, a-holding onto his arm and a-screaming like a hurt painter. I reckon he’s pretty nigh down to Mexico by this time. Want him particular, Colonel?”

“Want him?” and Crockett brought the butt of his rifle down on the ground with a thud. “Why, he was the head and tail and the skin and the inwards of this whole wicked business. Want him? Well, I reckon Sam and I did want him! But, what’s the use of crying for cream after the milk is spilt? Now, what’s to be done with the dead? Don’t seem white to leave them for the wolves, even if they be Greasers; and we can’t stop now to dig graves for them.”

“We’ll strap them on the backs of three of the horses, Davy,” and Sam McNelly joined the two men, “and take them with us until we can get a

chance to put them under the ground. 'Twouldn't be Christian to leave them atop the dirt; and we've horses to spare, now that we've captured all them," and he pointed to where the horses of the Mexicans stood tied to the trees in the edge of the little clearing.

"And the wounded?" inquired Davy.

"Of course we'll take them along. We ain't Injuns or Greasers," and Big Sam McNelly looked a bit indignantly at Crockett. "Now we'd better get a hustle out of here," and he hurried away to help saddle and bridle the horses.

In those rough pioneer days nearly all men and women were sufficiently skilled in a rude but effective surgery to care for the hurts received in fights with man or beast; and Mrs. McNelly, as soon as she learned that two of the Mexicans had been badly wounded, at once hastened to them, and, with all of a woman's tenderness, dressed and bound up their wounds as carefully and as gently as she would have done had they been her dear friends instead of her hated enemies.

The two Mexicans were wildly grateful. Evidently they had expected no such treatment from their enemies, but had supposed that they would be left to die uncared for where they had fallen, as, doubtless, they would have left any of the Americans had they fallen wounded into their hands under similar circumstances.

Scarcely ten minutes passed, so swiftly did all

hands move, before the horses were saddled and bridled, the wounded and the dead securely fastened on the backs of spare horses and our friends mounted and ready to depart.

The camp of Sam McNelly and his companions was only about half a mile away, in a little wooded valley surrounded by hills; and thither our friends hurried as speedily as possible, carrying with them all the guns and camp equipments left by the frightened Mexicans. Here were the horses of the four men, and here, to Trav's especial delight, he found Bing. Sam McNelly had tied the faithful dog to a tree, in order to prevent him from following them, when they started out to investigate the noise made at the Mexican camp during the excitement of the boys' attempted escape.

After a short consultation, it was decided that it would be safer to seek a new camping-place. Bill Thomas, the man who was with Davy and Sam and Jonas, had often hunted through this section and was familiar with the country. He now took the lead, and conducted the party to another little valley, hidden away in the woods a couple of miles distant; and here, on the grassy banks of a little stream of water, our friends went into camp, too anxious to hear the adventures of the rescued and the rescuers, since they had become separated, to think of sleep until all had been told.

CHAPTER X

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED

“NOW,” and Davy Crockett glanced around smilingly at the little group seated on their blankets around the blazing camp-fire that had been quickly built under the overhanging branches of two huge cottonwood trees, “I move that Mother Jane open this session by stating to the house—”

“Hold on, Davy,” interrupted Sam McNelly laughing. “You must think you’re back in Congress ’stead of Texas.”

“Shut up. What do you know about Congress? You never fired off your tongue in the marble halls of our national legislature,” and Crockett attempted to scowl ferociously at Big Sam McNelly, and succeeded in giving such a comical twist to his expressive countenance that everyone laughed. Indeed, so overjoyed were all at the rescue of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and the two boys, after the long terrible days of suspense and anxiety, that their delight had been continually bubbling to the surface in merry jokes and happy laughs ever since they left the Mexican camp, and their risibilities were still in that pleasant condition when laughter and smiles follow every little joke or comical look or act.

"Now," continued Crockett, still glaring at Sam McNelly, "if you open that big mouth of yours again to cast any more aspersions, as I heard a fellow in Washington say, on yours truly, I'll chuck this down your gullet," and he picked up a live mud-turtle, about the size of his hand, that had been allured thither by the light and warmth of the fire, and held it up threateningly, his eyes twinkling and his face struggling to preserve a look of severity.

"Don't, Davy. I'll be mum. I draw the line at swallowing mud-turtles," and Sam's teeth came together like the jaws of a steel trap, in simulated horror.

"There," and Crockett again turned to Mrs. McNelly, after the laughter had subsided, "I reckon you can now have the floor—ground I mean—without interruption, madam," and he bowed. "Kindly proceed to inform this august assemblage—I learnt them words too at Washington—by what wonderful tricks of magic that ornery Greaser got you and Kitty-Cat in his power, without your scratching his face to a flitter jig. I didn't reckon there was a Greaser in all Mexico that could do that deed and not have so much as a scratch to show for it. But, I reckon, you was took underhanded someway."

"Indeed and we were," and Mrs. McNelly's face sobered, while her eyes began to snap. "If we hadn't have been 'twould have taken more'n a dozen cowardly Mexicans, let alone two, to have got us,

wouldn't it, Kitty?" and she stroked gently the soft hair of her girl, who sat between her mother and father, half reclining in her mother's lap.

Kitty smiled up at her mother and squeezed the hand of her father that she was holding, but made no other answer.

"Of course I ought not to have been fooled so easily, knowing Mexicans as well as I do," continued Mrs. McNelly; "but when that snaky Vasquez—ugh, how I hate that man!" and Mrs. McNelly shrugged her shoulders and made a wry face, as if even uttering the name left a bad taste in her mouth—"and another Mexican, who appeared to be so weak that he could hardly keep in his saddle, rode up to the door of the house, and Vasquez told me that he had found the man starving in the woods, and begged that I would get him something to eat, what could I do but ask them both into the house?" and Mrs. McNelly glanced around the circle, a troubled look on her motherly face.

"Right, right, you did just right," broke in Sam McNelly. "Greasers or Injuns, blacks or whites, ain't never to be turned from the door of Sam McNelly starving. But," and the hard lines on his strong face deepened, "God help the miserable soul of a man who can use the sympathies of a woman and child to get the chance to do them hurt!"

"Reckon 'twould puzzle God Almighty Himself

to find any soul in such a skunk," Crockett declared, his eyes glinting angrily. "But, go on, Mother Jane, I can't see even now how the skunks got the best of you and Kitty-Cat so easy."

"'Twas by a cowardly, mean, dirty Mexican trick," Mrs. McNelly protested indignantly. "When they came into the house they wore their Mexican blankets; and the moment Kitty and I both turned our backs to them at the same time, they flung the blankets over our heads and shoulders and arms, and then, before either of us could get so much as a finger out from under the blankets, they had us all tied up with ropes like bales of hay, and we were flung on their saddles in front of them, and they rode swiftly away. In about an hour they were joined by five other Mexicans, and now all halted long enough to take the blankets off our heads. Then one of the men took Kitty up in front of him on the saddle, and I was placed on the back of an extra horse, and my feet tied together under the horse's belly; and again we hurried on, traveling as swiftly as the Mexicans could make the horses go, hour after hour, without stopping a moment.

"A little before sundown we came to a big canebrake that seemed to have no beginning nor end; and here the Mexicans halted, while one of them dismounted and began searching along the edge of the canebrake. Presently this man gave a shout, as if he had found what he was searching for; but,

before I could see what it was, a blanket was again thrown over my head, making it impossible for me to see anything, and we began moving forward again, now very slowly, as if every step was taken with the utmost caution. For, I should think, fifteen minutes we moved along slowly in this cautious way, then the horses were urged into a slow trot; and ten minutes later we again halted, and the blankets were pulled off our heads, for Kitty had been blanketed in the same way I had been; and, when we looked around, we found ourselves in a little opening cut in the canebrake, with the tall canes surrounding it on all sides. The Mexicans now dismounted, and, unsaddling and unbridling their horses, they fastened them to the canes and began making ready to camp there for the night.

“Kitty and I, the moment we had been taken off the horses, had had our hands and feet tightly bound and had been roughly thrown on the ground and told to lie there; but now Vasquez himself came and unbound us and bade us get up; and when I started to thank him, he burst out laughing, and told us that we were now his servants, his slaves, that slaves did all their master’s dirty work, that he had freed our hands and feet so that we might get them something to eat, and that, if we did not do as he told us to, he would whip us, whip us the same as he would a horse or dog belonging to him. He then ordered us to the fire, which some of his men had built, gave us a chunk

of venison and a little coffee and coarse flour, and bade us get it ready for them to eat and drink."

During this recital Big Sam McNelly's great fist had clenched itself more than once, and he had muttered, "Scoundrel," "Skunk," "Coward," "Villain," "Rascal," "Brute," "Reptile," and several other epithets that plainly indicated his feelings toward the Mexican; but, when Mrs. McNelly told how Vasquez had threatened to whip her and Kitty, as he would a dog, his rage mastered him, and, leaping to his feet, he roared: "Did he—did the cowardly skunk dare to touch you with his whip? If he did, I'll lash red ribbons out of his back, if I have to search all Mexico for him!"

"And I'll go with you!" broke in Crockett. "I'll go with you, Sam! The cur, the cowardly cur, to dare to touch a white woman with a whip!"

"No, no, he did not strike us," and Mrs. McNelly's eyes were full of loving gratification, as they glanced from the face of her husband to that of Davy Crockett. "We gave him no reason to strike us; but did whatever we were told to do, so long as it was anything fit to be done by white folks."

"And you and Kitty had to wait on them dirty Greasers, as if you were their niggers!" growled Sam McNelly. "There—there," he added quickly, when he saw the flush that came on Mrs. McNelly's cheeks at his words, "I ain't hinting that what you did wasn't proper and right, 'cause 'twas the wisest and bravest thing you could have done; but it goes

powerful against my grain to think of you and Kitty being ordered round by a lot of worthless Greasers, as if you were their niggers. You were mighty brave and plucky, and I'm proud of you both," and he bent and kissed Mrs. McNelly and Kitty, as he reseated himself.

"After the Mexicans had eaten what they wanted," Mrs. McNelly continued, appeased and gratified by her husband's words of praise, "Vasquez sent two of the men to guard the passageway to the opening in the canebrake; and the others, after strongly tying Kitty and me hand and foot, rolled themselves up in their blankets and lay down near the camp-fire.

"Along about the middle of the night one of the guards came running back in great excitement, and awoke Vasquez and the other Mexicans. For a few minutes there was the liveliest kind of jabbering; and then Vasquez and all the others, except one who was left to watch Kitty and me, picked up their blankets and hurried away with the guard, leaving us just a little hopeful that somehow you had got onto our trail in the canebrake and were coming to our rescue. But, in less than an hour, the Mexicans returned, carrying on their backs three bundles rolled up in blankets and tightly wound round with ropes, which they threw on the ground with many laughs and jokes, as if they were greatly pleased over something.

"Kitty and I were now untied and arrogantly

ordered to get something ready at once for the men to eat. I was in a dreadful fright on account of the bundles, for they looked like human beings tied up in blankets; but I did not dare say a word, and hurried to the fire and began roasting a chunk of venison thrust on the end of a long stick. I was still all of a-tremble with the thought of what might be in those blankets; and, when suddenly I heard Trav call, 'Mother!—Kitty!' I forgot everything but my boy, and, dropping the meat into the fire, whirled round and started to run to where he stood. But," and Mrs. McNelly's kindly eyes flashed angrily, "a big brute of a Mexican stopped me. Not once while we were prisoners were Kitty and I allowed to speak a word to the boys, and I the mother of one of them!"

"But—but you didn't tell how you nearly bit the finger off one of the Mexicans, and stuck the chunk of hot meat in his face, and burnt the end of his nose, and tumbled him over flat on his back on the ground!" broke in Trav excitedly. "Tell Davy and dad about that, mother."

"It is not for me to boast of my conquests," laughed Mrs. McNelly. "I'll leave that for you, Trav. But it did do me a sight of good to hear that Mexican howl, and to see him go tumbling over on his back holding to his nose. Reckon he won't clap his dirty hand over another white woman's mouth. Ugh! It makes me sick just to think of that dirty finger!"

"Sure, and we must hear all about that dirty finger and hot chunk of meat and burnt nose," laughed Davy Crockett. "I knowed Mother Jane would get in her work on the Mexicans somehow, and my ears are just aching to hear how she done it; and being that your mother's modest, like myself, I reckon you'll have to give us the history, Trav, so blaze away."

Then Trav told how Mrs. McNelly served the Mexican, who thought to stop her talking to Kitty by clapping his dirty hand over her mouth; and all laughed heartily over the discomfiture of the enemy.

"Now," and Crockett again turned to Trav, "Sam and I are mighty curious to know how you boys came to let them Greasers truss you up like Egyptian mummies in their grave clothes."

"Well," answered Trav, flushing, "I don't suppose it is much to our credit, but we were caught much the same as mother and Kitty were—blanketed"; and then he narrated what had happened to Tom and him, since his father and Davy rode away from the horse corral on that eventful day of the big bear-hunt.

"There, that's it! That explains how we lost the trail at Canebrake Creek, Davy," Sam McNelly broke in excitedly, when Trav reached the part of his narrative that told how they had discovered the concealed opening into the canebrake. "If we hadn't been so doggoned certain that the Mexicans

had pushed right on westward straight for the Mexican settlements, and had waited 'til daylight at Canebrake Creek, we'd surely have found that opening ourselves; and then," and his great fist came down on one knee to give emphasis to his words, "I'd like to have seen them Greasers try that blanket game on Davy and me! But 'twas cunning, mighty cunning in the Greasers; and sneaky, like a Mexican," he added, unwilling to give even that small measure of praise to a Mexican, without qualifying it. "Now, go on, Trav. It's powerful interesting."

"Let them have a sample of your teeth, did you, you old bear-smeller!" Davy Crockett chuckled when Trav described the escape of Bing. "Smartest dog I ever knowed, and better than all of us put together hunting Greasers," and he clapped Bing heartily on the back and stroked his fur.

Bing wagged his tail, and cocked his head a little to one side, and looked up into Crockett's face, as if he understood every word he said, and doubtless he did.

"Thought it was time you were digging out for Sam and me then, did you?" Crockett continued, still patting Bing. "Wanted to show us how we'd let them Mexicans fool us, didn't you, you old hairy sinner—But, that is our story. On with your tale of woe, Trav. It's 'most as interesting as a story book."

When Trav had completed his narrative of their

adventures while prisoners of the Mexicans, Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett were two very wrathful men; and it was some little time before their righteous anger cooled down sufficiently to allow them to relate the story of their own adventures.

"You tell it, Davy," Sam McNelly entreated, when importuned to begin the narrative. "You can tell it better than I can; besides, hearing about the cussedness of them Greasers has got me so riled up that I can't think of nothing but how good it would seem to be a-horsewhipping that Vasquez. If ever," and he gritted his teeth and clenched his huge fists, "if ever I meet that cowardly cur, I'll horsewhip him until he can't stand!"

"I'm so mad that I'm burning inside like a tar-kiln," growled Crockett, his strong fingers gripping tightly the barrel of his beloved Betsey. "Made Mother Jane and Kitty-Cat cook and slave for him like niggers, did he? Well, there won't be no horsewhipping if I meet the ornery cuss. There'll be just one short, sharp word from Betsey, same as they would be if I met a poison rattler, and then there'll be one more Mexican moving post-haste for a warmer climate."

"But, we want to hear your story. We want to know how you let the Mexicans fool you, and why you didn't find us before, and how you happened to be on hand just in time to save Trav from that licking," protested Tom.

"Well, I reckon you want to know 'bout all there

is to know, young fellow," grinned Crockett, the anger vanishing from his face like a cloud from a summer-sky. "Tain't much of a story, and 'twon't take long in the telling, which is fortunate, seeing that I'm getting mighty sleepy; but, such as it is, you are as welcome to it as the beggar was to the old woman's pudding."

"Now," and Crockett adjusted himself to a more comfortable position on his blanket, "when we rode away from Sam's horse corral, we calculated that the Mexicans would make straight as a string and as fast as horses' legs could carry them direct for the ford of the Brazos, that being the shortest way to the Mexican settlements to the west; so we didn't bother to follow the trail, but rode like a couple of young hurricanes straight for the river, where we found a piece of Kitty-Cat's dress hanging to a thorn-bush, which told us we were all right so far. Stopped here only long enough to scribble the note we left for Trav; and then hurried on, following the trail of the Greasers, which was plenty plain, they being too anxious to get as far away as possible before dark to bother to hide the trail. It was after sundown when we reached the big canebrake along Canebrake Creek, and of course we couldn't see the trail now; but we thought we knowed it all, that the Mexicans would push right through without stopping to camp, and so we didn't even hunt for signs of what the Greasers had done, but hurried through the canebrake as fast

as we could in the darkness, and rode right on to Mullen's Ford on the Colorado, where we went into camp to wait for you boys and the neighbors to catch up. And all the time them concerned Greasers was a-lying hid snug and cozy in the canebrake! Makes me mad plumb to the bone-marrow every time I think of how we let that passel of lazy, cowardly Mexicans fool us! Reckon our head-works must be needing oiling," and he turned a face picturing his self-disgust to Sam McNelly.

"New works, more'n oiling is needed, I'm thinking, Davy," McNelly growled. "It's like eating poison to be outwitted that way by a lot of Greasers."

"But, what happened after that? and why didn't you see your mistake sooner? and get on our trail quicker?" queried Trav, impatient to hear the rest of the narration.

"For the same reason that Kitty-Cat's wooden doll didn't break its head when it fell off the mantel, I reckon," Crockett answered, scowling savagely. "We were wooden-headed, and couldn't get rid of the idea that the Greasers were ahead of us, and making for the Mexican settlements on the San Antonio River; and so, when along about sunrise the next morning, Jonas Gifford and half a dozen of his neighbors rode into camp, and reported that they hadn't seen hair nor nail of you two boys, we concluded that you had either gone astray in the

darkness or got scart of the night and gone into camp. In either event we couldn't wait for you; so, leaving you a message, telling you in what direction we had gone, we all started hot on the trail of a number of horsemen that must have crossed at Mullen's Ford during the night a little while before we got there, and which we felt certain had been made by the brutes who were running off with Mother Jane and Kitty-Cat.

"For two days we followed this trail, nearly killing ourselves and horses in our efforts to overtake the riders; and then we come upon their camp and found that we had been following a number of settlers bound for San Antonio to join the Texans there; and during all this time them cussed Mexicans had been getting farther away with Mother Jane and Kitty-Cat! We went plumb nigh mad with the thought. But, since there ain't no use of crying for wasted powder after you have missed the bear, we got our thinkers together mighty sudden.

"Some were for keeping right on to San Antonio, and some were for back-trailing and making a new start, and some were for roaming promiscus like round the country, hoping to hit the right trail, and all were getting mighty down-spirited and desperate, when, hope I may be shot! if Bing didn't come bouncing into our midst, like a yeller ball with a wagging tail, and, I'll be blessed! if he didn't have

in his mouth a little worn pocket-knife, that Sam pounced upon at once as if it had been a million-dollar diamond.

“‘Kitty’s knife! Kitty’s knife!’ he yelled, holding the knife high above his head so that all could see. ‘Bing has brought me Kitty’s knife. I gave it to her a year ago last Christmas, and would know it anywhere. Bing,’ and he dropped on his knees by the dog’s side and flung his arms around his neck, ‘Bing, where is Kitty? Bing, old boy, where is Kitty and her mother?’

“Bing wagged his tail and whined, and then he pulled away from Sam, and ran a little ways back along the trail, and stopped and turned and ran back to Sam, and began wagging his tail and whining again.

“‘Come on, boys!’ shouted Sam, excitedly, jumping into his saddle. ‘Bing’s trying to tell us to follow him, and he’ll take us to Kitty and her mother. Come on!’

“But the rest of us showed him how worn and thin and foot-sore Bing was, as if he had journeyed far and hard, and how the knife looked as if the dog had carried it in his mouth for many hours, from which we argued that the Greasers must be now a long ways from the spot where Bing found the knife, and that it would be better for us to divide our force, and some of us to go on to San Antonio to be on the watch for the Mexicans there,

and the others to go back along the trail and see if the dog could put them on the track of the vermin.

“Sam at once saw that this was horse-sense; and it was agreed that the six men who came with Jonas should hurry on to San Antonio and make a hunt for Kitty-Cat and her mother among the Mexicans there, and that Sam and Jonas and I should take the back trail, and see if Bing could find the trail of the Greasers for us. Besides we were considerable worried over what had become of you boys, and hoped to meet you following along our trail. Of course we didn't know nothing about your being captured by the Mexicans then. Well, to make a long journey short, it was two days before Bing seemed to be able to hit the right trail, and then, on the morning of the third day, just after we had crossed the ford of a small river, he suddenly let out a glad bark, like he had found something that made him feel mighty good, and started off on the jump to the westward. We jumped our horses after him mighty quick, for we knowed that he had at last struck the trail. About a couple of hours later we came to where someone had camped, hid away in a little patch of woods. The ashes of the camp-fire was cold, but didn't look more than a day or two old; and right 'long side of where the fire had been we found a white piece of wood on which was written with a bit of charcoal, 'A woman and girl and two boys, captured by

Mexicans, beg any Texan or American who finds this to hurry to their rescue,' and was signed, 'Jane McNelly.' ”

“And you found that bit of wood!” Mrs. McNelly broke in, her eyes sparkling with satisfaction. “I wrote it on the sly and hid it under my dress, until just as we were starting away from camp I dropped it near the camp-fire.”

“Bully for you, Mother Jane!” Crockett continued. “’Twas a mighty cute thing to do; and made us feel a sight better, for now we knowed for certain that we were on the right trail, and what had happened to Trav and Tom, though we couldn’t just figure out how they had got into the clutches of the Mexicans, but we’d been powerful worried ’bout them, and any news was better than no news. Maybe we didn’t make the dust fly trying to overhaul you that day, but we didn’t get a sight of you; and when it got too dark to follow the trail we slid off into a little wooded valley surrounded by hills, and camped there, so as to hide our fire. Here Bill Thomas, who was hunting deer and bear, found us; and, when he heard our story, he vowed he would rather have a crack at one of them cowardly Greasers than at all the deer and bear in Texas, didn’t you, Bill?” and Crockett glanced to where the hunter lay on his blanket near the fire.

“Right, plumb right,” Bill answered, “and I got the crack, too,” and he glanced at the two wounded Mexicans who lay on a pile of blankets near him.

"That you did," agreed Crockett. "We all got our crack at the skunks, as them three we've just put under the ground," and he nodded toward a little mound covered with large stones, where they had buried the three dead Mexicans, "and them two a-top might testify.

"But, now to tell you how we happened to light down on them Greasers, like a thousand tons of yowling bobcats, at just the right identical moment to save that young rascal," and he winked at Trav, "a rip-roarous licking. You see, after Bill joined us, we sat round the camp-fire for a spell talking, then we rolled up in our blankets and began snoring, like a herd of hippopotamuses, at least Sam did; and it seemed like as if I hadn't been asleep more'n a couple of minutes, when I woke up sudden, sitting right up on my blanket and listening with both ears wide open.

"'Bang! Yell! Bang! Bang! Yell!-Yell! Bang! Whang!-Bang!-Yell!' like a young war came the sounds of a mighty lively scrimmage from out the darkness somewhere 'bout half a mile away.

"In two jerks of one lamb's tail the four of us were out of our blankets and, rifles in hands, streaking it like all wrath toward the sound of the firing, all except Sam, who stopped long enough to tie Bing to a tree and then came legging it after us, like a young steamboat with the throttle thrown wide open. Somehow the thought had struck all

of us to-once that you were in that rumpus, and we were mighty anxious to get into it, too.

“We soon found that the firing and yelling came from a little bunch of trees, like an island on the great plain; and, by the time we got to the edge of this woods, we’d cooled down sufficient to begin thinking sense, and stopped under a great cottonwood to get our breaths, and to take thought of how to find out what had been going on in them woods without butting our own heads into a nest of hornets. The firing and yelling had all ceased now; but we could hear a distant murmur of excited voices coming from the depths of the trees, and quickly decided to creep up and have a look at the owners of them voices, before introducing ourselves. So, careful as Injuns, we crawled toward the sound of the voices, and in a little while came within sight of a camp-fire, blazing in the center of a little opening; and, standing near the camp-fire, we saw a lot of Mexicans, bunched all together like a herd of steers in a storm, and jabbering and gesticulating worse than a cage full of monkeys.

“Suddenly Sam gripped my arm. ‘My God, Crockett, look there!’ he whispered, pointing toward the camp-fire. ‘Ain’t that Jane and Kitty, there ’tother side of the fire, by that big tree?’

“At that moment the woman and child turned, so that the firelight shone on their faces.

“‘It is! It is!’ and Sam’s fingers almost pinched

my arm in two. 'It is Jane and Kitty, Davy! Now, God have mercy on them Mexican skunks!' and his rifle came to his shoulder. 'We'll fire and charge!'

"But, before he could pull the trigger, I caught hold of his trigger-hand. 'Wait! wait!' I cautioned. 'T'won't do to knock the fat in the fire now that our hands are within reach of the skillet. There are a dozen of them Mexicans, and we're only four, but we must make them think we're a whole regiment;' and then we all crouched down close to the ground, and got our heads together, and planned how we four would surround them Mexicans, and charge them from four sides to- once, shooting and yelling like all creation was behind us. The hooting of an owl was to be the signal by which each was to notify the others that he was in his place and ready for the charge.

"Well," and Crockett paused and glanced round the circle of interested faces, "I reckon you know the rest better than I could tell it; how we scart the wits out of them Greasers and sent them flying toward Mexico like a flock of squawking geese. Now, it is moved and seconded and carried unanimously that we get to bed without another word from anybody," and Crockett, in spite of the laughing protests, deliberately rolled himself up in his blanket, and stretched himself out on the ground, his toes to the fire; and all the others in a few minutes sensibly followed his example.

CHAPTER XI

A MEXICAN MOB

THE next morning, after counseling together, our friends determined to go on direct to San Antonio, which was only about a day's journey from where they now were, according to Bill Thomas; and to remain there long enough for Mrs. McNelly and Kitty to recover from the effects of the hardships endured while prisoners of the Mexicans, before starting for their distant home. At this time the old Mexican town of San Antonio de Bexar, or Bexar, as it was then more frequently called, was held by about one hundred and fifty brave Texans under the command of Colonel William Barret Travis; and here, under their protection, Sam McNelly thought that his wife and child could rest in safety, until they were ready to begin the long journey of over two hundred miles back to the little log cabin. Accordingly, as soon as they had eaten their breakfast, they started for San Antonio, carrying with them the two wounded Mexicans in litters made by fastening blankets to two poles, which were borne by horses, one in front and one behind, walking between the two poles.

The two Mexicans appeared to be very grateful

for the care Mrs. McNelly so freely gave them, and for the rude kindness of the men; and, indeed, they had good cause to be, for, had their wounds been neglected they would have died, and had the men refused to be delayed by the trouble of bringing them along, and had left them to the tender mercies of the wolves and the vultures of the plains, their fate would have been too terrible to name. This the wounded men seemed to realize, as well as the fact that their evil deeds were being returned with good, something hitherto unknown to their code of morals, and there was a look almost of adoration in their eyes when they rested on the motherly face of Mrs. McNelly, as if they had already placed a halo around her head.

That night, after a long, wearisome ride over dust-covered plains, where little grew beside short wiry grass and scrubby post-oak and thorny nopals, our little cavalcade, with a great gladdening of hearts, rode into the quaint little Old-World town of San Antonio, just as the setting sun cast a glory of red and gold over the queer flat-roofed adobe buildings. They hurried direct to the Plaza de Armas, where Travis and his Texan soldiers occupied the *presidio*, or citadel, from which the Mexicans had been driven so heroically but a short three months before; for Sam McNelly and his companions were exceedingly anxious to see Colonel Travis at once. They wished to tell him of the six Mexican soldiers, direct from Santa Anna's army, that

had joined Vasquez, and of their report that the Mexican army was even then on the march for Texas; and they were anxious to learn from him the latest news. It will be remembered that, for something over a week, our friends had been wandering in the wilderness, away from all news centers, and, consequently, knew nothing of what had been happening in Texas during that time, and Texas was big with possibilities those days; and, naturally, now that they had the chance, they wished to hear all the latest news possible as quickly as possible.

Trav and Tom and Kitty were greatly interested in the queer, odd-looking adobe buildings, so different from the log cabins and the gable-roofed houses they were accustomed to seeing, that lined the sides of the streets through which they rode on their way to the quarters of Colonel Travis. Then, too, this was the town that old Ben Milam and his heroic three hundred Texans had stormed, only three months before, and conquered, although fourteen hundred Mexican soldiers behind stone walls defended by cannon attempted to keep them outside—three hundred against fourteen hundred defended by stone walls and cannon, and yet victorious!

Kitty and the two boys had often heard the story—what Texan had not?—and their good red blood had jumped and their spirits had thrilled at the hearing, as the blood and the spirits of the brave will ever at the telling of heroic deeds done by heroic

men; and now that they were riding through the streets of the very town where the good fight had been fought and won, and where the scars of the battle still might be seen in the bullet-marked walls and doors and windows of nearly every house along the street, their interest in all that was to be seen was magnified a hundredfold.

“There,” and Bill Thomas, who had been one of the heroes of this fight, pointed to the entrance of a house whose heavy cedar doors were splintered and scarred by axe and bullet, “right in there is where old Ben Milam was shot, just after we’d broke in the doors and was a-rushing into the house. I was not more’n six feet behind him when the bullet struck, and I saw him crumple up, as if all the stiffening had suddenly gone out of his body, and tumble to the floor, and afore we could lift him up he was dead, stone dead. But, I reckon,” and the hunter’s eyes glinted and his face hardened, “old Ben Milam’s spirit led us after that; for nothing, not even stone walls covered with Mexicans and roaring with cannons, could stop us; and we drove the Greasers from house to house, from stone wall to stone wall, shooting, stabbing, and clubbing our guns on their heads, until we’d shot and stabbed and knocked all the fight out of them, and then they fled to the Alamo under cover of the night, and next morning hung out the white flag of surrender.”

“And there were only three hundred of you,” broke in Trav, his eyes shining, “against fourteen

hundred armed Mexicans defended by stone walls and cannons!"

"Cartain; but every one of us was worth at least a dozen Greasers," responded the hunter grimly, "so 'twon't so uneven as it might seem at first sight."

"How many were killed?" asked Tom, the awe in his voice showing how deeply the words of the hunter had moved him.

"Must have been 'bout three hundred Greasers all told," answered Bill. "'Twas easy killing, with the thought of old Ben Milam lying back there dead."

"And how many Texans?" persisted Tom, his face glowing.

"Two killed outright, and 'bout twenty-five or thirty wounded."

"Bully for Texas!" burst out Davy Crockett, his dark eyes sparkling. "If it takes three hundred Greasers to get two Texans, how many Greasers will it take to get all Texas? That's what I want to know; and, I reckon, if Santa Anna tries to figure it out, he'll get the answer writ out big in the blood of Mexico. Wish I may be shot, if it don't make my blood jump worse than the sight of the biggest bear that ever mauled a dog, just to hear tell of such a scrimmage."

At this moment a tall Mexican, his face nearly concealed by his blanket and broad-brimmed Mexican hat, hurried from a doorway and started to

cross the street directly in front of our little party. When near the middle of the street he stumbled and fell almost under the nose of Sam McNelly's horse.

"Thundering Jove!" and Sam McNelly jerked back his horse. "Can't you see where you're going?—Look out!" he yelled, as in his struggle to get on his feet the man reeled nearer to him. "Or—"

There was a flash of steel through the air, and, with a vicious thud, a long keen-bladed knife struck the breast of the settler, point first; and the Mexican, with the swiftness of a startled deer, leaped from the horse's side and vanished in the dark doorway of one of the houses.

Big Sam McNelly, at the flash of the knife, attempted to jerk a pistol from its holster; but, with the weapon half drawn, he fell forward on the neck of his horse and would have dropped from his saddle had not the arm of Jonas Gifford, who rode by his side, caught him.

Davy Crockett, the instant he saw what had happened, caught Betsey up from the saddle in front of him; but, before he could get the gun to his shoulder and pull the trigger, the fleeing Mexican had darted into the doorway and vanished.

Bill Thomas jerked his pistol out of its holster, and sent a ball after the Mexican; but, in the darkness and hurry, missed, and, with an oath, dug his spurs into his horse and plunged, with Davy

Crockett close by his side, toward the doorway, through which the Mexican had disappeared.

Trav, when he saw the bright blade of the knife leap from the Mexican's hand and bury itself in his father's breast, dropped the rein of the litter-horse that he was leading, and, with a cry of horror, sprang to his father's side.

Kitty and her mother screamed at the sight of the knife, then flung themselves off their horses, and rushed to where Jonas and Trav were lifting Sam McNelly from his saddle.

Tom, who was leading the other litter-horse and rode where he could not see the Mexican throw the knife, did not know what had happened until he saw Sam McNelly falling from his horse, the Mexican leaping for the safety of the doorway, and Davy Crockett and Bill Thomas, smoking pistol in hand, plunging after him. Then he realized that an attempt had been made to assassinate Big Sam McNelly; and, gripping his rifle, he joined in the chase after the assassin.

By this time the street was in a wild turmoil. Excited Mexicans, men, women and children, poured from the doorways and thrust their heads out of the near-by windows. Agitated voices shrilled through the air. Startled dogs barked furiously. In an instant the quiet peacefulness of the street had been transformed into a riotous uproar of threatening, clamorous human beings.

Davy Crockett and Bill Thomas and Tom leaped

from their horses and attempted to burst in the closed door through which the assassin had fled. Black eyes flashed menacingly out of swarthy faces and a mob of furious men surged ominously toward them, as they pounded at the heavy door, while loud cries of, "Down with the American pigs! Kill the American pigs, who trample out the lives of free-born Mexicans with their horses' hoofs," were shouted from street and windows. A stone whizzed by Davy Crockett's head and struck the door in front of his face, another crashed against the butt of Bill Thomas's rifle; but neither man nor boy gave the missiles nor the threatening mob the slightest attention. Again and again they hurled their shoulders against the strong frame, again and again they struck it with the heavy butts of their guns; but the door had been too strongly made to be broken in by anything less effective than an axe. The mob surged closer and grew bolder. The stones came thicker, and the cries became louder and more threatening. Still the three pounded and thrust at the door, utterly regardless of the flying stones and the enraged Mexicans, anxious only to get after the cowardly assassin before he escaped from the house in which he had taken refuge.

Suddenly a girl's scream of terror, followed by a woman's cry, reached their ears.

Crockett, with a yell of rage, whirled around.

A wild mob was surging tumultuously about the

little group bending over Sam McNelly. Kitty was struggling in the arms of a Mexican, who was swiftly making his way through the crowd toward a friendly doorway. Already a dozen Mexicans had thrust themselves between him and Mrs. McNelly and Trav, who were fighting desperately to reach and rescue her. A half a dozen more steps and he would reach the doorway and the safety within.

“Drop that girl!” roared Crockett, his rifle leaping to his shoulder. From the doorway where he stood, he could overlook the crowd and see the Mexican distinctly. “Drop her, or—” His teeth snapped together like the jaws of a steel trap. “No, you don’t, you skunk!” and the long barrel flamed, just as the Mexican’s foot touched the first door-stone.

With a yell, the Mexican dropped Kitty and tumbled face downward; and the door opened and another Mexican rushed out and seized Kitty.

Crockett grabbed Tom’s rifle out of his hands and fired, just as the second Mexican was about to plunge back through the doorway with Kitty in his arms; and he fell across the threshold, his hands clutching tightly Kitty’s dress as he fell.

“Now, give them the butts!” Crockett shouted, swinging his rifle above his head and leaping straight toward the mob of Mexicans between him and Kitty, who was struggling desperately to free herself from the clutches of the dying Mexican.

Bill Thomas followed Crockett, and Tom, seizing his rifle which Crockett had dropped the instant he had fired, sprang after Bill Thomas.

Whack! — Thack! — Crack! — Whack! — and the heavy butts of the guns struck the heads of four of the Mexicans, who went down, like ninepins hit by the ball, before this onslaught of Anglo-American manhood, two of them knocked down by the butt of Crockett's rifle, and one each to the credit of Bill and Tom.

With shrill yells of terror the remaining Mexicans in front of the long-armed, terrible Tennessean tumbled over themselves and one another in their eagerness to get out of the reach of the fearful sweep of the deadly gun-butt, backed by the hardly less terrible butts of the guns of Bill Thomas and Tom, and opened up a wide lane, as wide as the sweep of their guns, before them; and then, yelling and cursing and threatening, closed in behind. For a moment it seemed as if all our friends, in spite of the heroic fight they were making, must be overwhelmed and beat down by this frenzied mob of enraged Mexicans; and, doubtless they would have been had not aid appeared at this critical juncture.

First, the Mexicans in the direction of the *presidio* uttered shrill yells of warning and fear, and fled, like rats to their holes; and then, as the sound of the marching of hurrying feet and quick-spoken words of command reached their ears, all

scattered, scurrying frantically through doorways and windows and down narrow alleys and side streets. As quickly as it had gathered, the mob had dispersed.

Tom, as he ran by the side of Davy Crockett toward the doorway where they had last seen Kitty, struggling in the grip of the dying Mexican, glanced quickly up the street to discover the cause of this sudden scattering of their enemies; and saw, coming on a swift run toward them, a small body of bronzed men, their long-barreled rifles held ready for instant use and their keen eyes flashing from side to side as they ran. There were not more than twenty-five men in this small company; and yet hundreds of Mexicans had fled at the mere sound of its coming! In a moment more Tom had reached the doorway; and the rescuers were forgotten in the shock of what he there saw.

On the door-stone lay one Mexican dead, and across the threshold lay the other, a piece of Kitty's dress still held in his stiffening fingers; but Kitty had vanished!

"Kitty! Kitty!" shouted Tom wildly, his limbs trembling so that he could hardly stand.

"Kitty-Cat! Kitty-Cat!" cried Crockett, glancing anxiously round, his weather-beaten face whitening. "Kitty-Cat, where are you? It is Davy calling."

But there came back no reply from the silent house before them. All their efforts to save the

dear girl had been in vain. She had been torn from the grip of the dying man, and borne away. The piece of her dress in the dead fingers told this.

“Into the house! We may be in time to save her yet!” and Crockett sprang against the door.

The door flew open with a bang. It had not been fastened. A long hall, with doors along each side, and opening into an interior courtyard, was before them.

“Kitty-Cat! Kitty-Cat!” again shouted Crockett in an agony of apprehension, and again the silent house and yards gave back no answer.

“’Tain’t no use stopping for the doors. Get to the court,” cried Bill Thomas, springing down the long hall followed by Crockett and Tom.

Near the center of the court a fountain gushed from a bouquet of marble flowers. A little grove of trees grew on one side, with flower beds between them and the fountain. Birds twittered in the trees and bright-colored butterflies fluttered among the blossoms. But not a human being was in sight.

Crockett leaped toward the grove—and stopped as suddenly as if every muscle and bone had been instantly turned to iron, and stood staring at the ground between two flower beds.

On the path between the two beds, hidden from him until that moment, lay a man on his back, with a great shaggy grayish-yellow dog crouched on his breast, his muzzle buried in the man’s throat.

“Bing! It’s Bing!” yelled Tom, who at that moment had reached Crockett’s side.

At the sound of the boy’s voice the dog unloosened his hold on the man’s throat, and, running to Tom, caught hold of his coat with his teeth and began pulling him toward the flower bed, whining and wagging his tail and looking up with persuasive eyes into his face.

“What is it, Bing? What is it, old boy?” and Tom, trembling with excitement, allowed the dog to lead him.

At the edge of the flower bed Bing dropped Tom’s coat, and, with a glad bark, leaped into the midst of the rich blooms, and thrust his nose against something that lay white and still, half hidden by the flowers.

For an instant Tom stared, and then, with a yell that made Davy and Bill jump, he leaped into the flower bed.

“Kitty-Cat! It’s Kitty-Cat!” and Crockett leaped after him; and the next moment Kitty was in his arms, and he was hastily examining the insensible girl.

“Sound as a dollar! She’s only fainted!” he cried jubilantly, as he bent and kissed the sweet white face. “Now we must get her to her mother mighty quick,” and he started back for the street, carrying Kitty as gently as a woman in his strong arms.

“Here, take a look at the ugly face of this

Greaser, and see if you ever seed him afore," and Bill Thomas caught Tom by the arm, as he started to follow Crockett, and pointed to the Mexican lying on the path between the two flower beds. "Might be that skunk, Vasquez."

Tom turned and glanced at the Mexican, who lay, with the horror of death in his eyes, staring straight upward.

"No," he said, shuddering at the terrible sight of the man's face and blood-stained throat, "it is not Vasquez himself, but it is one of the men who were with him, the one who struck Mrs. McNelly over the mouth. Is—is he dead?"

"Dead as a skinned coon. Now, let's get out of here," and the old hunter's eyes glanced suspiciously around the pleasant little court, with its marble fountain, singing birds, blooming flowers—and dead Mexican.

Kitty was sobbing in her mother's arms, when Tom and Bill Thomas reached the street. Trav and Jonas were bending anxiously over a stranger, who, with skilled hands and experienced eyes that told his profession, was examining Sam McNelly's wound. By their sides stood a tall, keen-eyed man, whose sword and dress indicated that he was an officer; and around them, leaning on their long-barreled rifles, were grouped the bronzed men, whose appearance had caused the sudden scattering of the Mexican mob.

The surgeon lifted his eyes to the officer.

“The wound is not dangerous,” he said, “but it will be best to get him to the barracks as quickly as possible.”

The officer turned to his men and commanded them to place the wounded man in one of the litters—the two wounded Mexicans had both vanished with the mob—and bear him to the barracks. Then he approached Mrs. McNelly.

“Doc says that your husband’s hurt is not serious,” and he inclined his head courteously to Mrs. McNelly. “I have ordered my men to carry him to the *presidio*, where we have our barracks, and where he will receive every care at our disposal. Now permit me to conduct you and your daughter to my wife, who will give you a most hearty welcome, and gladly render you all the assistance that one good woman can give another in the hour of trouble. I am Lieutenant Almeron Dickinson from Gonzales, now serving in the garrison at San Antonio under the command of Colonel Travis,” and again he bowed.

The soldiers lifted Sam McNelly into the litter, Lieutenant Dickinson assisted Mrs. McNelly and Kitty to mount their horses, and then all hurried to the *presidio*, where Colonel Travis and his men were anxiously awaiting the return of Lieutenant Dickinson.

CHAPTER XII

A GLORIOUS AMERICAN TRIUMVIRATE

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL WILLIAM BARRETT TRAVIS, commandant of the Texan garrison at San Antonio de Bexar—one of the most heroic characters in our country's history—was a tall, manly-looking, red-headed young man, then but twenty-eight years old. He welcomed our friends with the courtly solicitude of a Southern gentleman; and, in a very short time, all had been made as comfortable as possible, Sam McNelly, accompanied by Kitty and her mother, being taken direct to the quarters of Lieutenant Dickinson, who insisted that Mrs. Dickinson should be given the privilege of nursing the wounded man and of caring for Mrs. McNelly and Kitty. The others remained with Colonel Travis and his officers to tell them the story of their adventures.

Trav and Tom had heard much of this slim young North Carolina lawyer, William Barrett Travis, who had left wife and baby boy to help Texas in her struggle for liberty and independence. They knew the part he had played in driving out the first Mexican garrisons; and the tales of his splendid courage and deeds of daring had often sent

their young blood jumping, and made them long to do the same kind of heroic deeds for their homes and country. Hence, there was just a little hero-worship in the eyes the boys turned to his pleasant face, when, after seeing that every thing possible had been done for the comfort and care of the wounded man, he returned to the little group of officers and men that had quickly gathered round Davy Crockett and his fellow travelers.

As Colonel Travis approached the spot where our friends stood, he was joined by a remarkably tall man, with something of the sinuous litheness of the panther in every movement of his lean athletic frame. He had curly-reddish hair, and steel-gray eyes, the kind that glitter like the points of two Toledo rapiers when angry.

"Colonel James Bowie, Colonel Crockett of Tennessee," and Colonel Travis bowed to Davy Crockett, as he presented his companion.

"I'm mighty glad to know you in the flesh and bone," Crockett said, as he reached out a hand that was eagerly seized by Bowie, his shrewd dark eyes looking unflinchingly into the steely gray eyes. "I've knowed you by name and fame so long that I feel 'most like an old friend," and he shook the hand heartily.

"Davy Crockett of Tennessee!" and the keen gray eyes of Bowie lighted. "And his famous rifle! Well, you're both powerful welcome just now. I fancy you will find the game we're hunting

now in Texas even more exciting and dangerous than your famous bears of Tennessee, Colonel," and the gray eyes of Bowie twinkled.

Davy Crockett! and Jim Bowie! and Will Travis! Glorious triumvirate of American heroes.

No wonder that Trav and Tom stood and listened in the silence of awed boyhood while the three heroes talked, their eyes turning oftenest to the face of Jim Bowie, for, of the three, his was the most terrible reputation, won in many desperate encounters, against fearful odds, with rifle or pistol or the deadly knife that he had already made famous. Involuntarily the eyes of both boys went to his belt at the thought of that knife. Yes, there the fearful weapon hung in its leather scabbard; and, when they looked at the long muscular arms, the lithe sinewy frame, the fearless steely eyes, they no longer wondered at the stories they had heard of the terrible prowess of this man when armed only with his deadly knife and the frenzy of the fight ran riot in his hot blood.

"I wish he would draw the knife from its scabbard," Tom whispered to Trav. "I should like to see the blade that he has made so famous."

At that moment, as if in answer to Tom's whisper, Bowie thrust one hand into his pocket, pulled out a long plug of tobacco, and then, with the other hand, drew the terrible weapon from its sheath.

"Have a chew?" he said, proffering the tobacco and knife to Crockett.

"Scratching wildcats, Bowie," laughed Crockett, as he took the tobacco and knife, "you don't use this famous blade for a tobacco chopper, do you? I reckoned nothing short of live human flesh was good enough for it to cut. Wish I may be shot if the bare sight of it ain't enough to give a man with a squeamish stomach the colic. And the feel—" And he ran a finger lightly over the keen razor-like edge of the blade—"Hu—I'll just use my own knife to cut off my chew, Colonel," and he handed the blade back to Bowie.

"You might tickle a fellow's ribs a long time with this instrument, Colonel, before you'd make him laugh," smiled Bowie, and the steel points came into the gray eyes, as he affectionately fingered the knife for a minute before dropping it back into its sheath.

As briefly as possible Davy Crockett narrated their experiences with the Mexican, Vasquez, and his followers, and described the sudden and unexpected attack that had been made on them a short time before in the street.

"Now," he concluded, "I'm plaguy certain 'twas the hand of that skunk, Vasquez, that throwed that knife, and his friends that started the row, hoping to get away with Kitty-Cat or Mother Jane or both in the confusion before you fellows could come to our rescue."

"You are right," broke in the surgeon, who had just returned from attending the wounds of Sam

McNelly. "Mr. McNelly had a glimpse of the rascal's face just as he threw the knife, and he is certain that it was the identical scoundrel that abducted his wife and child. Besides, here is the name on the knife," and he drew a particularly wicked-looking Mexican knife from his belt and handed it to Crockett. "I wanted to examine the knife to see if the blade had been poisoned, a gentle Greaser trick— No," he added hastily, as he caught sight of the look of alarm on Trav's face. "I found no poison on the blade, and the wound is not at all dangerous. Your father will be as fit as a painter for another scrimmage inside of a week."

Cut deep in the bone haft of the knife was the name—Vasquez.

"It would be vain to attempt to find the scoundrel now," Colonel Travis declared, his voice trembling with indignation, as he read the name on the knife. "Every Mexican in San Antonio would lie to shield him and every Mexican house and hut offers him a hiding-place. But," and his face hardened, "if ever you meet that Greaser again, shoot him at sight, the same as you would a mad dog. It is the only way to deal with such villains in this lawless country."

They were a very angry lot of men who surrounded our friends, when Crockett finished his story; but, as Colonel Travis had said, there was nothing they could do now by way of showing their anger, except to curse Vasquez and his followers, in

particular, and all Mexicans, in general, which they at once proceeded to do with a most satisfying vigor and completeness.

“Now,” and Crockett turned to Colonel Travis, as soon as the air had cleared sufficiently for him to get a word through it, “we’re powerful anxious to know what has been doing in Texas during the ten days we’ve been hunting Greaser abductors; and what sort of a Reception Committee, as they used to say in Washington, has been delegated to meet his High Monk-a-Monk, the President General *Excelentisimo*, Santa Anna and his army, being that we are so soon to have a call from him, according to them six Mexican soldiers that joined Vasquez.”

The pleasant face of Colonel Travis clouded, at the mention of the coming of Santa Anna and his army, Bowie frowned and swore under his breath and fingered the haft of his terrible knife uneasily, and the men scowled and muttered angrily something among themselves about Doc Grant taking all the horses and the cussed slowness of the Council in sending them supplies and reinforcements. Evidently things had not been running as smoothly as they should, at least not in that part of Texas.

“Texas,” Colonel Travis said sadly, “has forgotten us, or, at least, has neglected us, until now I fear it will be too late, if, as you say, Santa Anna and his army are but a few days away. And we are all that lies between Santa Anna and unprotected

Texas! Here is where he and his army should be met and driven back off the free soil of Texas. This is the spot where Freedom should make her first and bravest stand. If Texas had an army here now to meet Santa Anna and his army— But,” and his eyes swept the little encampment of Texan soldiers, scarce a hundred and fifty strong, “this is all Texas has left us to meet and drive back the thousands of Santa Anna, all that stands between the Mexican soldiery and our unprotected frontier, with its thousands of defenseless women and children. We cannot, we dare not for the sake of those same defenseless women and children, abandon our post here and suffer the savage hordes of Santa Anna to swoop down upon them almost without warning; and we cannot hope to defeat and drive back an army, even of Mexicans. We can only hope to delay their advance, until the settlers have had time to take warning and flee, until Texas can arouse her defenders and prepare an army to meet the army of Santa Anna; and this we must do, at whatever sacrifice to ourselves, at whatever sacrifice to ourselves,” he repeated softly, his brave face saddening and a far-away look coming into his eyes. Did he already foresee the Alamo and its gloriously fatal defense, and the weeping faces of his loved wife and baby boy, who were never to see again in this life the dear husband and father?

“But, why don’t General Sam or the Council or

Governor Smith send you more men?" Crockett inquired hotly.

"Because," Bowie answered, his gray eyes glinting angrily, "General Sam, as you call him, and Governor Smith and the Council and a lot of other big and little men are too busy among themselves to have any time to bother with us way out here in a little frontier Mexican town. Like a team of obstinate mules they're all pulling and kicking and braying against one another. But, I reckon the coming of Santa Anna and his army will pull them up short in their traces—too late to do us any good. But," and the rapier points glittered in his eyes, "we're enough to show Santa Anna and his army of Greasers how Texans can fight, and die, if they must; and the fewer our number the greater our glory. Aye, it will be a great fight, Davy, a great fight! The fight of my life, Davy!" and the gray eyes scintillated and glittered and the tall frame expanded; for the greater the odds of battle, the more joyous and glorious seemed the prospect to this remarkable man, this American viking, desperado, patriot, hero.

"I am with you, by the eternal I am with you, Jim Bowie!" and Crockett gripped Bowie's hand. "You can count on Davy Crockett, so long as there is a bullet in his pouch or a drop of hot American blood in his veins. But, I'd like to jab a pitchfork into them pesky government mules, wish I may be shot, if I wouldn't. Of course you have asked for

reinforcements and told them your situation?" and again Crockett turned to Colonel Travis.

"Yes," and Colonel Travis smiled, "the Council knows our needs, the governor knows, the commander-in-chief of our armies knows, all know how utterly inadequate in men and munitions we are to hold this place against any considerable armed force; and yet we must hold it, we must hold it long enough to check the advance of Santa Anna's army, long enough for the women and children to flee, or, God have mercy on our helpless frontier! Oh, if Fannin would only come!" and, involuntarily the eyes of Travis turned in the direction of Goliad, where Fannin with over four hundred men lay nursing his fatal indecision. "With his men added to our men we might do something effective to stay the progress of Santa Anna, might even defeat this Mexican Thunderer, this self-styled Napoleon of the West. We could at least hold San Antonio until General Houston could gather together his army and come to our rescue. United, we might conquer; but, separated, Santa Anna can crush us both! Alas, why cannot Fannin see this! See that here, not at Goliad, is the place to defy the Mexican despot! But, what is the use of dreaming of might-bes. It is the will-bes that we must be thinking about," and the light deepened in the glowing eyes and the firm lips tightened. "We have only to do our duty, and leave the duties of others for the others to do. Now," and he turned to our friends,

“you are weary I know, and, as it is already late for soldiers who must be stirring early, with your permission, I will show you to your quarters. They are soldier quarters; but, let the warmth of our welcome soften their hardness,” and, turning to a couple of soldiers, he bade them take torches and lead the way.

Trav and Tom had listened to the brave words of Colonel Travis and Bowie with glowing hearts. They understood the situation well enough to know that not one word had been uttered idly, that these heroic men were deliberately preparing to place their bodies between the brutal hordes of Santa Anna's army and the defenseless homes of the settlers, and doing it knowing that the chances were that they would be overwhelmed and crushed; and the courage and patriotism of both boys had been so moved that they longed to be with them in the glorious venture.

“I hope that Santa Anna will come before we go,” Tom whispered to Trav, as the two lads followed behind the men and the flaring torches. “I should like to show him how Texan boys can fight for their homes and liberties, for their mothers and sisters. Oh, as Bowie says, it will be a great fight, a great fight!”

“Yes,” Trav answered slowly, “it will be a great fight, and I should like to see it and be in it, should like to face that tyrant, Santa Anna; but,” and his face saddened, “there are mother and Kitty, and

father is wounded. They must go from here before the Mexicans come, or," and he lowered his voice, "I fear they will never go at all; for, if I can understand the meaning back of Colonel Travis's words, he does not intend to retreat before the army of Santa Anna, and that will mean a fight to the death. But, aren't they great, Travis and Bowie and Crockett? Just to hear them talk makes a fellow feel like pulling off his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves and wading into the whole Mexican army alone, with Santa Anna thrown in on top for good measure."

Here the two torch-bearers entered a long low stone building, and the boys, who had fallen a few steps behind in order to talk more freely, hurried forward to the side of Davy Crockett. Down a long hall the torch-bearers led the way, and stopped before a great oak door, which Colonel Travis threw open and stepped back for our friends to enter.

The room was small, not over twelve feet square, with bare stone walls and floor, and without furniture of any kind, unless the little pile of blankets in one of its corners might be called a bed. Its single window was protected by heavy iron bars and looked out on an interior court, now shrouded in the darkness of night.

"This building," Colonel Travis said, as he dismissed the two soldiers and taking the torches thrust them into iron sockets, one on each side of the

door, "is known as the Priest's House, on account of its having been occupied by the priests before the capture of the town by the Texans; and this is one of their sleeping rooms. Not a very luxurious chamber," and he glanced around with a smile. "But I can assure you the priests made themselves very comfortable in it. However, the soldiers have stripped the whole house of everything that would burn for fuel and left it as bare as a stable. But you will find plenty of blankets in the corner," and he nodded toward the pile of blankets; "and soldiers' beds are the best we have to offer now. May no priestly ghosts appear to disturb your rest. Good night," and, smiling and bowing, he stepped from the room and closed the door behind him.

For half an hour Davy Crockett and Jonas Gifford and Bill Thomas and the two boys sat and talked over the happenings of the day in the red light of the torches; and then, when at last, in a flare of smoke, both torches burned out, Davy rolled himself up in a blanket, stretched his long body out on the hard stones of the floor, and signified his intention of going to sleep by declaring that he would "chuck his boot down the mouth of the first one to utter a loud word before morning."

The others all followed his example, and in ten minutes more were sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRIGHT SPOT OF SUNLIGHT

TRAV was the first one to awake the next morning. He lay almost underneath the single window of the room, through which the bright rays of the early morning sun were now shining and falling in a glowing patch of white light on the stone floor a couple of feet from his head. For a moment he stared wonderingly round at the stone walls of the bare room; then, as he realized where he was, his eyes turned quickly to the window, and, following the ray of light, rested on the glowing patch on the floor.

Suddenly Trav sat bolt upright on his blanket, his eyes staring at a glittering object that lay on the floor, not two feet from where his head had lain, and where the sunlight shone directly down on it.

"Tom! Tom!" and he seized Tom, who lay close by his side, roughly by the shoulder and shook the still sleeping boy violently. "Wake up! Look there!" and he pointed to the glitter in the bright spot of light.

Tom sat upright with a jerk, rubbed his eyes, and stared in the direction of the pointing finger.

"What— How did that get there?— Davy!

Father!" and he sat still, his eyes fixed on the shining patch of bright sunlight.

Davy Crockett and Jonas Gifford and Bill Thomas started up from their blankets at the first call of Tom, and turned anxious, inquiring faces toward the two boys.

"Look—look there! How did that get there? I am sure it was not there when we went to sleep," and Trav again pointed toward the thing glittering in the bright spot of sunlight.

"A Mexican dagger, by the eternal!" and Crockett reached forth a quick hand and seized the glittering weapon that had so greatly startled Trav, and Tom. "And with the sender's card! Mighty polite, these Greasers," and he pulled from the dagger a square piece of white cardboard, through which the keen blade had been thrust up to its haft. "Reckon it's another Greaser message," and he held the card up to the light.

Rudely drawn on the card, apparently with blood, was a red dagger dripping red drops, and underneath the dagger was roughly printed these words:

"Next time knife not miss heart of
Big Bull, who crack skulls of Mex-
icans with bare fists. Next time, wife
and girl no rescue. Fool Mexican
once; never twice. No escape Mex-
ican vengeance. Mexican arm long.
Reach round earth and strike sudden

and deadly, like rattlesnake. My father, my brother, I will avenge.

“VASQUEZ.”

Trav and Tom shuddered as they read this card. They seemed to see the wicked, cunning, grinning face of Vasquez leering triumphantly at them from behind it. Was there no escaping the toils of this villain?

But, if he could reach their room, might he not also have reached the room of Mr. and Mrs. McNelly and Kitty? At the thought Trav's face whitened, and he sprang to his feet.

“Father!—Mother!—Kitty!—He might—” Here the boy's voice faltered. “I must go to them at once,” and, with quick hands, he began pulling on the few garments he had taken off for the night.

“Shucks, Trav, don't let a little Greaser blood on a white card scare you,” and Crockett contemptuously thrust the dagger and the bit of pasteboard into his pocket. Nevertheless he was the first one ready and led the way out of the stone-walled bedroom.

The Priest's House opened on the west side of the Plaza de Armas, the site of the old Mexican barracks, now occupied by Travis and his Texan soldiers; and, when our friends stepped from the gloomy old stone building into the clear cool air of that bright February morning, they found themselves in the midst of an animated and interesting

scene. Soldiers were hurrying hither and thither, some with pails of water from the public fountain, others with bundles of firewood, all busily preparing their morning meal, and all joking and laughing, as if such a thing as Santa Anna and the Mexican army had never been heard of. Indeed, these were men who would have a fling even at grim Death itself.

On the other side of the plaza Colonel Travis stood talking with Jim Bowie. The moment Crockett saw them he gave the view-halloo and hurried over to where they stood, followed by the others; and showed them the Mexican dagger and card, and told where they had been found.

While Travis and Bowie were examining the dagger and card, Lieutenant Dickinson appeared; and reported that he was the bearer of an invitation from Mrs. Dickinson for Trav and Tom to eat breakfast and spend the day with Kitty and her father and mother.

“Then—then nothing happened to anyone during the night?” Trav inquired eagerly. “And mother and father and Kitty are all right?”

“Yes, certainly— Why, what have you there?” and his eyes rested on the Mexican dagger.

“Just a little remembrance from our Greaser friend to show that he has not forgotten us,” Crockett said, as he handed Lieutenant Dickinson the card and dagger. “Found that this morning on the floor under the window of our room in the

Priest's House; and we were a bit worried, thinking that he might also have remembered Sam and Mother Jane and Kitty-Cat in some such Greaser-like way. Betsey's just got one word to speak to that skunk, if ever I sot eyes on him again," and Crockett's dark eyes flashed. "Now, trot along to your fodder with the lieutenant," and he turned a grinning face to the two boys; "and mind you, don't say anything about this little Mexican memento to Sam or Mother Jane. 'Twould only rile Sam's temper, and worry Mother Jane, and whiten Kitty-Cat's pretty cheeks to know about it. The top of this beautiful morning and a kiss to Kitty-Cat," he called after the two boys, as they hurried away with Lieutenant Dickinson.

Mrs. Dickinson, with a little bright-eyed girl, just old enough to talk and walk, clinging to her dress, met Trav and Tom at the door, and gave them a most cordial welcome, which, after a moment's hesitation, during which the bright eyes most carefully scrutinized the faces of the two lads, was thus lovingly seconded by the little miss: "I's glad to see oo. Tome and tiss me," and the sweet lips were upraised to the faces of the two boys.

They found Sam McNelly sitting up in an easy chair, with Kitty and her mother hovering lovingly about him. His face was a shade or two whiter than usual; but the same merry twinkle was in his eyes, and the voice in which he greeted the boys was as big and strong and blithesome as ever.

Evidently the surgeon had not misjudged his wound.

Tootsey, as the lieutenant had affectionately nicknamed his little daughter, promptly climbed up into Trav's lap the moment he was seated, and her soft little hands at once began an exploring expedition over his face, lingering about his nose and eyes and finally resting with one chubby finger hooked into each of his ears.

"Oo is all right," she said, and kissed him.

Trav was delighted, and the others all laughed merrily; and Tootsey, from that moment, claimed Trav as her own, and thereafter, whenever he was present, she would have very little to do with anybody else.

The breakfast was eaten in the invalid's room, on a large pine table, covered with a snowy-white table-cloth, which considerably awed Trav and Tom, who were unused to any such table refinements, but delighted the feminine eyes of Kitty. And a merry meal it was, one that Trav and Tom often thought of in the after days, and always with a sigh for the gallant young officer, who so graciously presided over its bounties and kept everyone laughing with his merry tales and kindly witticisms, and who was so soon to be numbered with the world's heroic dead.

That night, a little before sundown, Trav and Tom were summoned by a messenger to the quarters of Colonel Travis, where they found Bowie and

Crockett in earnest consultation with the colonel.

“Jim and I are going to have a try at finding that knife-throwing Greaser skunk, Vasquez,” Crockett said, the moment the boys came in the room, “and we want you boys to go along as sort of stool-pigeons. We reckon he’ll be hanging ’round some of the Mexican joints, and like as not we can run onto him; and, if we do, there won’t be any more knife-throwing and dagger-messages. Anyway, Bowie and I can’t rest until we have a try. Are you willing to go along? ’Twill be some risky.”

“Sure, we’ll go,” both boys answered eagerly.

“Then get your pistols and knives, but leave your rifles and meet us at the fountain in the plaza in about an hour. We’re not quite through with our pow-wow with the colonel yet.”

Trav. and Tom at once hurried back to the Priest’s House, where they had left their weapons, carefully reloaded their pistols; and then, with their pistols and hunting-knives in their belts, sought the fountain in the plaza, there to await the coming of Crockett and Bowie.

CHAPTER XIV

CROCKETT CALLS BIG IKE'S BLUFF

THEY had nearly an hour to wait before Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, accompanied by Colonel Travis, appeared. Both men were armed, as were the boys, only with their knives and pistols, and both wore heavy Mexican cloaks and broad-brimmed peaked Mexican hats.

“Attention, company! Forward, march!” Crockett sang out as he came up; and without any further words the two boys fell in behind the three men.

At the boundary to the plaza Colonel Travis, cautioning them to remember how valuable their lives were just now to Texas and not to expose them rashly, bade them good-by, and returned to his military duties.

Crockett and Bowie, bidding Trav and Tom to keep close behind them, started at once down a dark street, which led to where they could hear the sounds of Mexican revelry and see the lights from many torches and candles shining through the windows of shops and places of amusement—the only street-lights afforded by San Antonio at that date.

It will be remembered that it was now an hour or more after sundown, and the night was cloudy and very dark.

As they approached the lighted area of the street the two men drew their cloaks closely around their bodies and up high over their mouths and noses, after the manner of Mexicans, who fear the taste of cold air as a cat fears water; and, just before they reached the first lighted windows, they paused in the black shadows of a projecting building.

"Now," Crockett whispered, "you boys just wander on ahead, like as if you never knowed us, always keeping your eyes peeled for Vasquez; and we'll follow on close behind promiscus like and not acting as if we knowed you. If he gets sight of you and sees that you're alone, like as not he'll think that you're his bear, and not get scary, but try some game to get you in his power, and give Bowie and me a chance to get at him; and then, we'll do the rest," and he smiled grimly. "Understand?"

"Yes," "yes," answered both boys.

"Then get a hustle on you; and remember that we're nothing but a couple of straying Greasers, so far as you are knowing, until the time for action comes," and Crockett gave each of the boys a gentle push ahead toward the light and the music and the merry sounds of revelry.

San Antonio at this date was almost entirely a Mexican town. Outside of the Texan soldiers garrisoning the place there was scarcely an honest

foreigner in all the town; but there were many renegades and desperadoes from the "States," who had fled their country for their own and their country's good. These apostates to country and race were leaders in all kinds of Mexican devilment, and spent most of their time when in town in the dance-halls and saloons, ready to take a hand in anything going that promised to tickle their depraved sense of sport. The Mexicans themselves are a merry race, when with their own kind; and the street was thronged with cloaked figures hurrying from one place of amusement to another; and through many an opened door came the tinkle of guitars or the twang-twang of banjos or the softer strains of violins, and the sounds of dancing feet and light-hearted laughter.

Trav and Tom were greatly interested. Everything, people, houses, clothing, and ways of merry-making, all were new and novel to their eyes; and many were their surprised and curious glances, as they threaded their way through the crowds of cloaked men and rebozo-hooded dames and girls, whose black eyes flashed in the light like jewels. Before a large building, brilliantly lighted, whence came the sounds of music and the dancing of many feet, the two boys paused hesitatingly.

"Go in. Go in," whispered a tall cloaked figure, as it pushed roughly by Trav and entered the door.

For an instant the words startled Trav, then he smiled to himself at his timidity, as he recognized

the tall form of Bowie in the cloaked figure of the whisperer.

“Come on,” and he turned to Tom. “Let’s have a look inside,” and he followed the tall figure into the building.

The room in which the boys found themselves was large, and lighted with many flaring candles and torches, and heavy with the fumes of liquor and tobacco smoke and dust pounded out of the floor by the dancing feet. Near its center whirled the dancers, to the clicking of castanets, the tinkling of guitars, and the merry strains of violins, the light mantillas of the black-eyed señoritas floating gracefully about their dark hair and glowing faces, and the slashed trousers and bright sashes of the cavaliers adding color and picturesqueness to the gay scene. Seated and standing around the dancers and leaning up against the bar in one end of the room was an ever-shifting crowd of men and women, watching the whirling bodies of the gay señoritas and señors and every now and then recruiting their ranks with a couple who had just entered or had been resting.

One of these men, standing almost directly across the room from the door, glanced quickly, out of a pair of black snake-like eyes, in the direction of the boys as they entered, started slightly, and then slid swiftly behind the broad shoulders of a huge red-whiskered man, who stood, with great legs spread wide apart, his bloodshot eyes following every

movement of a particularly graceful and beautiful Mexican girl, who was dancing the fandango with a bewitching abandon that turned in her direction many an admiring eye. Unseen, from behind this whiskered bulwark, the pair of black snake-like eyes kept close watch of Trav and Tom.

"Now," thought Trav, the moment his eyes had become accustomed to the bright light, "let us first see if Vasquez is in the room"; and, with this end in view, he pushed himself forward, with Tom at his elbow, to the front rank of the watchers, his eyes searching swiftly the faces of the men in the circle, and then turning, with a disappointed look, to the dancers.

At this moment the beautiful Mexican girl whirled almost directly in front of the boys, and her eyes, dancing as fascinatingly as her feet, flashed into their faces. For a minute she pirouetted before them, keeping her bold eyes on their faces, and then, suddenly, she gyrated up to Trav, lightly as a flitting butterfly, and stopped, bowing and smiling, directly in front of the astonished boy, whose face flushed the color of the crimson mantilla that now hung in pretty disorder about her neck, and held out a soft little dimpled hand to him.

Trav stared at the little hand blankly for an instant, then gingerly seized it, gave it a couple of quick jerks, and dropped it as if the soft flesh burned his fingers.

"Dance, she wants you to dance with her, you

young idiot," bellowed a rough voice from the crowd.

But there was no dance in Trav's trembling legs; and, hardly knowing what he did so great was his embarrassment, he stepped back and turned his back on the girl.

Instantly the room was in an uproar. A dozen men, desperadoes every one of them, headed by the huge, red-whiskered bulwark to the pair of black snake-like eyes, rushed toward Trav, to avenge what they deemed an insult to the beautiful Mexican girl; while the owner of the pair of black eyes moved swiftly among the Mexican men, speaking in short, quick sentences to here and there a man, who at once began working his way through the crowd toward the spot where the two boys stood surrounded by the angry men.

"You won't dance to please this little beauty, hey?" roared he of the red whiskers. "Well, then, dance to please me," and he jerked out of his belt a huge double-barreled pistol and leveled it at Trav's feet, whose legs had ceased to tremble now that he had to deal only with men. "Dance, you white skunk. Lively now, or—" and the pistol flamed and the ball buried itself in the floor not half an inch from Trav's toes. "Dance, or off goes a toe at the next shot. Dance, you—"

"Now, don't get too rip-roarously rambunctuous, friend," and the tall form of Davy Crockett, his cloak thrown open and one hand resting on his belt



"Now don't get too rip-roarously rambunctious, friend."

T.

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suggestively near the butt of his pistol, stepped in front of the be-whiskered champion. "The youngster meant no offense. He was just naturally dazzled by the beauty of the gal."

For an instant Red Whiskers glared at Crockett in astonishment at his temerity in daring to brave his wrath; and then, as he caught the cold, steadfast glitter in Crockett's eyes, the hand that had been about to turn the pistol in his direction remained where it was.

"Hey!" he roared, his red eyes glowing like coals of fire. "I am Big Ike, the Red Terror of Texas, who never met his equal in man, beast, or devil. I drink blood, eat raw flesh, and pick my teeth with the bones of the men I have killed. Now, who be you that dares to come between Big Ike and the object of his wrath?" and, with every red whisker bristling, he turned on Crockett a pair of furious, bloodshot, tigerish eyes.

"I am that same Davy Crockett," and the gleam in the cold, steadfast eyes never wavered, and the hand never left the belt near the butt of the pistol, "fresh from the backwoods of Tennessee, half horse, half alligator, and a little touched with the snapping-turtle, shaggy as a bear, wolfish about the head, active as a painter, and can grin like a hyena till the bark curls off a gum-log. I can wade the Mississippi, leap the Rio Grande, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey-locust. I can whip my weight in wildcats,

and, if any gentleman pleases, for a ten-dollar bill he can throw in a painter. I can hug a bear till his ribs crack and he growls for mercy, and I promise to swallow, without gagging, if you will skewer back his ears and grease his whiskers, this same Red Terror of Texas, who drinks blood and eats raw flesh, and picks his teeth with the bones of the men he has killed," and Crockett paused, his eyes still on the tigerish eyes of Big Ike.

During this remarkable rhapsody Big Ike stood staring at Crockett, as if he could not believe his eyes and ears; and when Crockett stopped speaking he still stood and stared at him.

Even the mad jam of men that had gathered close around the leading actors in this wild scene, stood still and stared at Davy Crockett, utterly dumbfounded by the words and actions of this strange, fearless man, who had so effectively and defiantly called Big Ike's bluff. But they knew Big Ike, knew that no man had ever before thus boldly defied him and lived five minutes; and, after the first shock of surprise, those nearest to him, with a shuddering glance at his red brutal face, began pushing backward, so as to be out of the reach of the terrible blast of wrath that they knew must surely follow so bold and deadly an insult.

Trav by this time had recovered from the confusion of mind into which the swift series of shocks he had received since entering the Mexican dance-hall had thrown him; and, when Davy Crockett

stopped speaking, he stepped quickly to his side, and, placing his hand on the butt of his pistol, stood glaring angrily at the red-headed giant who had come so near to shooting the toes off his feet, ready to do some shooting himself, if there were need.

Tom, with a very white face, but without an instant's hesitation, joined Trav.

And thus, in the sudden silence of that startled room, where, for the instant, no one seemed to dare to breathe and every sound was stilled, the three, Davy Crockett and the two boys, stood facing the desperado, Big Ike, and back of him a dozen other white desperadoes, and back of them a wolfish pack of glaring Mexicans.

For, possibly, a full minute, although in the dread silence of that room the time seemed much longer, Big Ike stood staring at Crockett, his red face growing redder, the wrath in his bloodshot eyes glowering more furiously; and then, with a roar that made the white foam fly, he swung the hand that held the double-barreled pistol, one barrel of which remained loaded, swiftly toward Crockett.

But, swift and sudden as were the movements of Big Ike, the actions of Davy Crockett, whose eyes had never once left the red-whiskered face, were swifter and more sudden. With a spring forward, quick and sure as the leap of a wildcat, he swung back his right fist and struck, with all the might of his muscular arm and body, straight at the huge red head; and Big Ike, even with the mad yell

coming from his lips and the smoke leaping harmlessly from his pistol, shot backward and sideward, and landed on the floor with a thud that made the flames of the candles and torches jump. The next instant Crockett, with his pistol in one hand and his knife in the other, stood over the prostrate body of the desperado; and by his side, knives and pistols in their hands, stood Trav and Tom.

For a brief moment, the mob of white desperadoes and the wolfish pack of Mexicans behind them stood as if paralyzed by this sudden and unexpected overthrow of their champion; and then a shrill Mexican voice, coming from a few feet back of Davy Crockett, yelled: "Down with the Americanos! Down with the enemies of Mexico! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The cry broke the spell; and, with curses and yells—whatever else these desperadoes were they were not cowards—they drew their knives, they dared not use their pistols in that crowded room, and rushed toward Davy Crockett and the two boys; while, at the same moment, three Mexicans, lithe as cats, crept up from behind, their long heavy cloaks held in their hands ready to throw over the heads and shoulders of the Americanos, and back of them, urging them on with shrill whispers, crept the man with the black snake-like eyes, his left hand gripping a long Mexican dagger, and his bandaged right hand held in a sling.

At this critical juncture, Jim Bowie dropped the heavy cloak, that up to this moment had shrouded

his face and tall figure, over his left arm, and, with a swift whirl, wrapped it around the arm for a shield, and, with a smile on his lips and the rapier-points glittering in his steel-gray eyes, leaped in front of Crockett, his long murderous knife flashing wickedly in the light.

“Guard your back, Davy! Guard your backs, boys! I'll give these devils in front all the fighting they want. Now, gentlemen,” and, joyously as a schoolboy rushing to a ball game, he faced the desperadoes, “Jim Bowie is ready. Come one at a time, or come all together, as you wish,” and the terrible knife and the more terrible eyes of Jim Bowie flashed into the faces of the mob.

“Bowie! It's Jim Bowie! I ain't wanting none to commit suicide!” and the man directly in front of Bowie started back, his appetite for fighting suddenly vanishing at the sight of that long knife in the grip of its redoubtable owner; and back of him the others paused, the dread name of Bowie sending a chill even to their hot blood. They knew that the first two or three men to come within reach of his knife were sure to be killed, although the others might conquer him, but they were not of the breed from which martyrs spring.

Crockett and the two boys, at the warning words of Bowie, whirled swiftly about, and they were just in time; for the arms of the three Mexicans were already raised to make that fatal cloak-throw, which would have rendered them helpless long enough for

their enemies to rush in and overpower them. But, with three knives and as many pistols suddenly thrust into their faces, the courage of the Mexicans vanished, and they slunk back into the glowering crowd.

"Don't shoot unless you've got to," Crockett warned Trav and Tom. "Even Greaser blood ain't sweet smelling on one's hands; and I reckon we four are men enough to beat off this cowardly gang of renegades and Greasers. Not one of them dares to come within reach of our knives. Is it for the door, Jim, or shall we clean out this pesky nest of Greaser skunks first?" he said in a low voice to Bowie, who stood back to his back.

"Make slowly for the door with the boys, Davy," Bowie answered, his eyes never for an instant leaving the faces of the men in front of him. "We must get them out of this. I will guard your rear. Don't shoot, if you can help it. Trust to the knife. But, if there is any shooting to be done, be the first to pull the trigger. What, gentlemen, is there no one among you bold enough to cross knives with Jim Bowie? Then, two of you, three of you, all of you! Cowards! Skunks!—"

"Shoot the barking cur!" cried someone back in the crowd.

"Shoot!" echoed other voices from different parts of the room, and pistols began clicking.

"Aye, shoot, shoot!" raged Bowie. "Shoot, you

pack of cowards, shoot the man you are not man enough to face knife to knife! Shoot—"

A pistol shot rang out, and Bowie staggered back, only to instantly straighten up, with a red mark showing across his forehead, while from the other side of the room a shriek was heard, telling where the bullet had struck with deadlier effect.

At this moment Trav uttered an exclamation, and pointed with his knife toward a group of Mexicans that had gathered near the doorway.

"Look, Davy, look! There by the doorway!" he cried excitedly. "That man with his right arm in a sling! That is Vasquez! I am sure it is Vasquez!"

"So it is, the pesky skunk," and Crockett's eyes flamed. "Now, by the great father of all bears, I'm for getting him, Greasers or no Greasers! Come!" and with a yell that nearly split the ceiling, Crockett leaped straight toward Vasquez, followed by Trav and Tom and Bowie, whose keen eyes had quickly taken in the situation, all yelling like madmen.

Insane as the act seemed it was probably the wisest thing they could have done; for that sudden onslaught of yelling American manhood and flashing steel was more than Mexican flesh and blood could stand, and, as Davy Crockett afterwards said, they "broke like a gang of scart steers, and went out of doors and windows in flying jumps."

As for Vasquez, one glimpse of Davy Crockett

leaping toward him was enough to put springs into his every muscle; and, without stopping for the door, he made a frantic jump for a window, and went through glass and sash and all, and plunged madly down a dark alley, where he vanished like a chased rat in a lumber-yard.

Trav and Tom could never tell just how they got out of that dance-hall. In front of them, for a minute or two, there had been a shrieking jumble of screaming Mexicans, tumbling over themselves in their haste to get out of the reach of the knives of the mad 'Americanos; and then, suddenly, they found themselves outside of the building, surrounded by Texan soldiers, with Lieutenant Dickinson inquiring excitedly of Davy Crockett and Bowie the cause of the trouble, and terrified Mexicans fleeing madly up and down the street. In another minute every Mexican had vanished, and every light had been put out, and our friends and the Texans stood alone in the dark street.

"If it hadn't a-been for that window, I'd have got that darned skunk, sure," Crockett complained, as he stood glaring up and down the dark and empty street. But, crash—bang, like a mad steer going through a tin shop, out of the window he went, with a dozen other Greasers tumbling after him, and, when I got there, all I could see was the flap of his coat tail, as he dove into a dark alley. But, how happens you and them soldiers to be here?" and he turned to Lieutenant Dickinson.

"Because," smiled the lieutenant, "Colonel Travis was wise enough to know that it wasn't safe—for the Mexicans, I mean—to turn you and Bowie loose among a lot of Greasers; and so he ordered me to take a dozen men and follow on behind you, to see, if any trouble began, that you didn't completely depopulate the town. Hope you spared the aged and the women and children," and he glanced toward the now silent and dark dance-hall.

"It won't much of a fight," and Bowie's eyes followed the lieutenant's regretfully. "Just began to smell like as if it was going to be a hot one, when Davy knocked the fat all into the fire. 'Twon't do to yell like you did in there, Davy, if you want to get within knifing distance of a Greaser. And just as the scrimmage began to look promising, mighty promising!" lamented this remarkable man, who looked upon a chance to fight much as a small boy does on an admission to a circus. "Now, I reckon, there's nothing else for us to do but to trot back to quarters. Every Greaser has fled to his hole, and 'twould be worse than hunting skunks to get them out."

Bowie was right. There was nothing else to do now, but "to trot back to quarters"; and, less than an hour later, Tom and Trav were both sound asleep on the hard stone floor of their little room in the Priest's House.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLIGHT BY NIGHT

FOR a week Sam McNelly's wound obliged him to remain inactive under the hospitable roof of Lieutenant Dickinson. But, by the end of that time, the loving care of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty, and the skilled nursing of the generous-hearted Mrs. Dickinson, aided by the rugged constitution of the hardy settler, had wrought wonders; and on the morning of the eighth day the surgeon declared him "fit for a scrimmage with anything from a bobcat to an elephant," and laughingly discharged him from what he called the Dickinson Hospital.

During this convalescing of Sam McNelly Trav and Tom enjoyed themselves immensely. They became acquainted with every soldier in the garrison; and there was not one among them who was not worth the acquaintance of any boy. True, they were rough men, rough in their manners and rough in their speech; but every one of them was brave and loyal, the kind of a man who would die for a friend or his country, without a grumble or a thought that he was doing anything heroic or out of the ordinary but just the "square thing."

All of them had "done things," as Trav expressed

it, had fought Indians, or desperadoes, or Mexicans, had hunted bears and buffaloes, had witnessed strange and fearsome scenes in the lonely forests and on the vast plains; and when the darkness of night came, and the camp-fires glowed ruddily, and these doers of deeds gathered around their red coals and began telling tales out of their wild and adventurous lives, the two boys would sit and listen with breathless interest until the last camp-fire had died down and the last story-teller had rolled himself up in his blanket and had gone to sleep. And, on one never-to-be-forgotten night, for three hours, they had sat and harkened entranced, while Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett and Colonel Travis pictured to one another the times when each thought death had got the strangle-hold and was about to throw him on his back. Think of it, boys, to sit and listen for three hours, while three such men tell of the most exciting and thrilling experiences in all their adventure-crowded lives!

Then the days had been crowded, every one of them, with interesting scenes and experiences. Sometimes they wandered about through the streets of the queer little Old-World town, but never alone, always they had the company of some of their soldier friends, to guard against any devilment on the part of Vasquez or his friends. One day they accompanied Colonel Travis and Bowie and Davy Crockett on a visit to the quaint old mission-fort known as The Alamo, shortly to be made world

famous by the heroism of these very men, situated just outside the town across the San Antonio River.

“Here is where we must defy Santa Anna, if he comes,” Colonel Travis said, as they stood on the parapet of the Tower Room and looked down on the thick walls of the old monastery and church, where, in the days even then long past, the Spanish friars had vainly sought to drive the wild tribes of the surrounding Indians into the Catholic fold. “It is the strongest position at our command; and, few as we are, from behind its thick walls we can give a good account of ourselves, if necessary, to Santa Anna and his thousands; and, if Fannin and his four hundred men should come, I am sure we could hold it against any force Santa Anna can bring against us,” and again, as often he had done during the past week and was often to do in the days to come, Colonel Travis turned his eyes eastward longingly in the direction of Goliad.

“No use counting on Fannin, Colonel,” Bowie answered impatiently. “With Governor Smith and General Houston pulling one way and the Honorable Council pulling the other, and both issuing contradictory orders or no orders at all, Fannin is left to do his own ordering; and, if I know the man, he won’t be able to make up his mind what is the wisest thing to do, until it will be too late for us, and maybe for himself. Fannin is as brave a man as ever lived, but he is cursed with acute indecision. No, I reckon, Colonel, we’ve just got to depend on

ourselves alone; and I, for one, am not mourning over it. The greater the odds, the greater the excitement and glory," and this strange man actually smiled, and looked southward toward Mexico, instead of eastward toward Goliad, as if he were longing for the appearance of Santa Anna and his army, while his haggard face—the sickness that in a few days compelled him to take to his bed was already in his blood—lighted and the gray eyes glittered.

"Second that look, Jim," Crockett laughed, as he noted the direction of Bowie's eyes. "Betsey and I are getting mighty anxious, too, for a sight of that World Shaker, Santa Anna; but, I reckon, we could shake the shaker just a little harder if we had Fannin's four hundred with us, and still get our bellies full of excitement and glory. Howsomever, Fannin or no Fannin, I calculate we can make a noise like Waterloo to this upstart Napoleon of the West."

"We will make victory more costly to him than defeat," Travis declared, as he led the way down from the parapet and into the monastery building. "With these thick walls to protect us we can make him pay dearly for every drop of Texas blood that he sheds."

Prophetic words!

The buildings of the old church and monastery greatly interested Trav and Tom, as with boyish eagerness and curiosity they wandered about through them, while the three men apprized their

value as a fortification and planned how best to defend them, in case of need.

Then there were the happy hours spent with Kitty and "Tootsey" Dickinson inside the barracks. Indeed, there was not a waking hour of the whole time when Trav and Tom were not enjoying themselves; and, consequently, when, on the evening of the day Sam McNelly was declared fit again for the hardships and dangers of travel, the two boys were told that early the next morning they would start for Goliad, on their way back to the little log cabin now so long deserted, they received the information with the greatest sorrow and even begged that they be allowed to remain with the little garrison to fight Santa Anna and his army, when they came. But Colonel Travis himself at once put an end to these pleadings of boyish enthusiasm and patriotism, by absolutely refusing to permit Trav and Tom to join his little company of heroes.

"Your duty, my brave lad," he said, when Trav appealed to him, "is not here, but by the side of your mother and sister. They will need your protection on the way home, they will need it after they reach home; for I understand that both your fathers," and he glanced toward Tom, "will hasten to join General Houston's army, as soon as they have Mrs. McNelly and Kitty safe at home again, and will leave you boys in charge of their homes. That, my brave lads, is where your present duty lies," and,

with a smile, he absolutely refused to listen to another word of their pleadings to be left with the little garrison in San Antonio. So Trav and Tom were compelled to give up all hope of taking part in the great fight that even the terrible Bowie declared would be the fight of his life.

During this talk of the boys with Colonel Travis, Sam McNelly and Davy Crockett had quietly slipped to one side, where they would be out of hearing of the others.

"Colonel Travis tells me, Davy," Sam McNelly said, the moment they were alone, "that you've about made up your mind to stop here and fight Santa Anna and his Greasers along with the rest of the boys," and he looked inquiringly into his friend's face.

"Yes, that's mighty nigh right," Crockett answered slowly, "only, instead of 'about made up,' the colonel should have said 'pointedly made up.' I don't believe there is another spot in all creation where Davy Crockett and Betsey can do as much good now, as right here, and it's my pluck to stay. Makes me feel savage as a meat axe every time I think of Santa Anna turning loose his Greaser hordes on them defenseless women and children back there in the settlements, and Betsey and I've just got to stop and argue some with him before he does it. For just one fair crack at that rascal, I'd bargain to break my Betsey and never pull trigger

again; and maybe I'll get it, maybe I'll get it," and the lines on Crockett's face hardened and his eyes glinted savagely.

"But, Davy, there's no hope of one hundred and fifty men stopping an army long, even an army of Greasers; and—and—" Sam McNelly hesitated, "I've heard that Santa Anna is going to give no quarter to anyone found with a gun in his hands and shooting it toward a Greaser. Better go back to Goliad with us, Davy. Kitty-Cat and Mother Jane want you to. They'd feel a mighty sight safer, if you was along; and there's no telling what devilment that Greaser, Vasquez, will be up to. Better come back with us, and join General Houston's army along with Jonas and me. I reckon we'll get our bellies full of fighting under old Sam Houston. You'll come, won't you, Davy?" and there was just a touch of wistfulness in the big settler's voice.

"No, Sam, I'm going to stay. 'Tain't my way to right-about-face before a danger, especially when I'm between it and women and children. I reckon I know what you're thinking, Sam, that this is a sort of a forlorn hope, that the chances are that Santa Anna will get the scalps of all of us; but, now, honest Injun, Sam, is that any reason why Davy Crockett should not stay?"

"No, no, Davy," and the big fist of the settler gripped Crockett's hand. "It's the brave thing to do; but—well, I can't talk about it," and he wrung

the hand he held. "I'd stay with you, if 'twon't for Kitty and her mother. They've got to be away from here before Santa Anna and his army comes. I know you understand, Davy."

"Indeed and I do; and I know there is not a drop of cowardly blood in all your big body, that it is harder for you to go than to stay—But—" Crockett's eyes caught sight of the weather-beaten face of a man hurrying to where Colonel Travis stood—"there is one of the hunters Travis sent out a couple of days ago, and he looks as if he had news to tell. Come, let's see what it is about," and the two men made haste to join the little group that had already gathered round Colonel Travis and the hunter.

The moment Colonel Travis saw Sam McNelly he turned quickly to him.

"Sam," he said, his eyes glinting brightly, "Santa Anna is almost upon us. You must start for Goliad at once, this very night. To-morrow morning might be too late. Long Hank," and he nodded toward the hunter, "reports that he met some Indians on the banks of the Rio Frio, who told him that Santa Anna and his army crossed the Neuces two or three days ago, and were headed straight for San Antonio. If the Indians told the truth, the advance guards of the Mexican army might be even now closing in around us; and, for the sake of your wife and child, you had better start at once, under cover of the night. I will send Colonel Bonham,

with letters to Fannin, along with you. He knows the trail, and will get you there safely, if any man can. Lieutenant Dickinson," and he turned to the young officer, "you had better send Mrs. Dickinson and the baby with them. This will soon be no place for a woman and child."

All was now excitement in the little garrison. Sam McNelly and the two boys at once hurried to the quarters of Lieutenant Dickinson to apprise Kitty and her mother of the sudden change in their plans and to assist them in getting ready, followed by the young officer, white of face and determined to let no selfish love stand between him and the safety of his wife and baby. Jonas Gifford and Colonel Bonham, aided by the willing hands of officers and men, immediately set about saddling the horses, packing the blankets and provisions, and getting everything in readiness for the start. A dozen scouts were sent out in every direction to see if they could discover any signs of the Mexican army.

Mrs. Dickinson listened to the words of her husband, urging her to leave San Antonio with Mrs. McNelly, with whitening cheeks and tightening lips.

"I cannot go, I cannot go and leave you, and leave these other men, the sick and wounded," she cried. "Women have duties as well as men; and my duty tells me that my place is by my husband's side in his hours of peril, is here to care for the sick and the wounded, and here I am going to stay,

Santa Anna or no Santa Anna, as long as you stay," and from this resolution the pleadings of her husband, the commands of Colonel Travis, were vain to move her.

In an hour all was ready for the start; and our friends stood by the sides of their horses saying their farewells to these gallant men, to the even more gallant woman, who had so nobly chosen to remain with her husband, knowing that that choice might mean death.

Colonel Travis was deeply affected. There were tears in his eyes when he said his farewells to Mrs. McNelly and Kitty; and, when he grasped the great hand of Sam McNelly, he whispered low: "Sam, God alone knows the future; but—if—if—if I should fall here, give these to my wife and boy," and he dropped into the hand of the settler his watch and large seal ring. "She will understand, she will know all that I should like to say now, but can't put into words. God bless them! God protect them! Get word to General Houston of our condition here as speedily as possible. Urge Fannin to come immediately to our rescue. Tell all that we will hold the place as long as there is a man left to pull a trigger or grip a knife, that we will never surrender. Good-by," and, with a final pressure of the great hand, he turned away.

For a minute, before saying his good-bys, Davy Crockett stepped aside into the dark shadows of a building. He appeared to be having some trouble

with his throat and eyes, for he swallowed hard a number of times and brushed his hand across his eyes once or twice. Then, with a final gulp, he straightened up and stepped to where Trav and Tom stood beside their horses.

“Well, boys,” he said, extending a hand to each, his face breaking into a broad smile, “I’m mighty sorry you can’t stop to see the great performance called, Knocking The Conceit Out Of Santa Anna, The Napoleon Of The West; Or, Twisting The Tail Of The Great Mexican Monkey, accompanied by the lightning and thunder of the cannon’s flash and crash and a rain of bullets, the greatest spectacle of modern times; but I’ll give you a full history of the glorious performance the next time we meet. Now,” and the hand-grip tightened, “it’s good-by for a spell. Be mighty careful of Kitty-Cat and Mother Jane; and, if you get a sight of that Greaser, Vasquez, shoot him as quick as you would a rattlesnake.” For a moment he stood gripping the two hands of the boys in silence and looking steadfastly into their eyes, his face sobering. “Lads,” he continued, “this at best is a mighty uncertain world, for, as the good book says, ‘To-day we are and to-morrow we ain’t’; and, if it should happen that we should never meet again, just remember Davy Crockett found, ‘Be sure you’re right, then go ahead,’ a mighty good motto to live by, and to die by,” he added in a lower voice—“Shucks!” and the jovial grin came back on his face, “if Davy

Crockett ain't getting as sentimental as a school-girl. Of course we'll meet again, and like as not I'll have Santa Anna's scalp-lock dangling from my belt," and, with a final hand-squeeze and a word of farewell, he turned to where Kitty and her mother stood.

"Kitty-Cat," and Crockett caught the little hand held out to him in both of his, "you'll find them two bearskins I promised you on the floor of the cabin, and one of them is a whopper. Always keep the big one, just to remember your old friend Davy Crockett, who hopes you'll grow up into as good a woman as your mother and marry as good a man as your father. Now, for the good-by kiss, Kitty-Cat—"

"But," and Kitty dropped Crockett's hands and threw her arms around his neck, "I don't want to say good-by. I don't want you to stay here to fight Santa Anna and get killed. I want you to go with us. I want you to go with us," she repeated with all the insistent pertinacity of youth. "I know, I've heard papa and Colonel Travis and Bowie talk, I know you'll be killed, if you stay, and I shall never see you again. You saved my life, you rescued me from that wicked Mexican, and I want you to go home with us so that I can show you how much I love you. You must come, Davy. You must not stay here to be killed," and she clung to him, her arms around his neck and the tears running down her cheeks.

“Shucks, Kitty-Cat,” and Crockett kissed the tear-stained cheeks and began gently unloosening the arms around his neck, “one would think to hear you talk that ’twas certain death to face that old Mexican wind-bag, Santa Anna. Why, ’twon’t be nothing much more than a big Fourth of July celebration, with lots of banging and yelling and other noises; and then you’ll see Santa Anna and his Greasers streaking it like all wrath for the Rio Grande, and I’ll come round and have a good laugh with you over your scare, wish I may be shot, if I don’t, just as soon as I’ve helped the boys lick the hide off Santa Anna. Now, we mustn’t keep your dad waiting. Good-by, Kitty-Cat, sweetheart,” and Crockett, with a last hug and kiss, swung Kitty upon her horse, and turned quickly away.

The other good-bys were soon said. Between the men it was a warm clasp of the hand, a searching look into the eyes, a cheery word of farewell, and, maybe, a low-whispered message to some dear one. That was all; and that was all these stern men would have said or done had they absolutely known that fate had already decreed that those who remained, remained to meet death. But, when Mrs. Dickinson lifted the baby up for the farewell kiss, the tears came into the eyes of Trav and Tom and their voices choked, and Mrs. McNelly and Kitty sobbed aloud, and implored her to come with them; but the heroic woman again refused, faithful to the end to her duty and her husband.

“All a-horseback for Goliad!” cried Big Sam McNelly, anxious to cut short these distressing scenes of parting, and, springing into his saddle, he gave the word to start.

The little cavalcade rode slowly out of the Plaza de Armas, past the last line of Texan sentries, and entered one of the dark narrow streets leading out of the town toward Goliad.

Trav and Tom and Kitty, as they passed into the darkness of the street, turned in their saddles for a last look; and saw, illuminated by the ruddy light of a great camp-fire, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie and Colonel Travis, standing tall and grim side by side, and back of them the hardy, roughly-dressed forms of the Texan soldiers, leaning on their long-barreled rifles, all showing distinctly in the bright firelight against the black background of the night and the dark shadows of the frowning fronts of the barrack buildings. Then the street made an abrupt turn, and the picture vanished, and our friends rode on, leaving behind them the tall form and genial face of Davy Crockett and his dauntless comrades—as gallant a band of heroes as ever bravely faced overwhelming odds in all the world’s history.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BOOMING OF THE CANNON

GOLIAD, or La Bahia, as the town was then frequently called from the mission of that name established near there by the Spaniards, is situated on the San Antonio River some ninety miles southeast of the town of San Antonio. Here Colonel J. W. Fannin, a soldier trained at West Point, had gathered an army of four hundred men to repel the expected invasion of Santa Anna; and, on account of this little Texan army, Colonel Travis and Bowie thought it would be safer for our friends to return to their homes by way of Goliad, where, if it was found that the surrounding country was in the hands of the Mexicans, they could remain under the protection of Fannin, or secure an escort from him through the danger zone.

The trail from San Antonio to Goliad, followed the waters of the San Antonio River as nearly as possible, and ran through vast primeval forests, as yet unscarred by the axe of man, over the rocky tops of rugged heights and more gently sloping hills, across great plains, ungrazed except by nature's cattle, winding tortuously through the wooded and rocky parts, going straight ahead across the plains,

passing sometimes within hearing distance of the murmuring waters of the river and again a mile or more away, but always seeking the least difficult route for horse and man to travel from starting point to destination. Such was the road that lay before our friends, when they had left the last flickering light and barking dog of San Antonio behind them and turned their faces southward toward Goliad.

The night was cloudless, and a crescent moon hung in the clear skies, giving sufficient light to enable them to see their way clearly. For the first two or three hours they rode slowly and with great caution, keeping a sharp lookout in every direction. There might be detachments of Santa Anna's scouts guarding the trail or camped along the river, and there was the vengeful Vasquez, who might have learned of their departure from San Antonio and set in motion some wicked scheme for their undoing. So you see there was an abundance of threatening dangers to keep their wits on the alert and to cause the eyes of each one of the little party to search anxiously the shadows of the rocks and woods that here and there along the trail-side offered places of concealment and ambushade to an enemy. But not a sign of a human being was seen, nor a sound of human origin heard. So far as they could observe they rode alone through the vast solitudes of these great forests and plains.

A little after midnight they made a brief halt,

to rest and feed their horses and to appease their own hunger; but they dared build no fire, and in less than an hour they were again on their way, riding more swiftly and with less caution now that San Antonio and its dangers had been left so far behind.

When morning dawned they again halted, this time for a couple of hours' rest; and then on again across the plains and over the hills and through the forests. All that day, and all of the next day, they rode steadily southward, without seeing a single human being, Mexican or Texan, other than those in their own party, or even a single large wild animal. There was something ominous in this absence of human and animal life.

Old hunters and dwellers on the great plains and in the lonely forests say, that a few hours before the coming of one of those terrible storms that frequently sweep over these regions, the wild animals may be seen hurrying to places of shelter, knowing in some wonderful manner of the coming of the storm and fleeing from it. In some such way the premonition of the coming of Santa Anna and his army had affected the territory through which our friends were traveling; and man and beast had both fled before the feeling, shall we say in the air? of the advancing danger, and had left the region desolate of all except the smaller forms of animal life. And, indeed, a mighty storm was advancing, a storm of more deadly portent than

roaring thunder and flashing lightning and falling rain, the storm of murderous war.

Trav and Tom noticed that each morning at sunrise Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford and Colonel Bonham, would pause, no matter what they were doing, and appear to be listening intently and anxiously for a few minutes, and then with a look of relief would resume their work. The first morning the boys wondered greatly why the men did this, and the second morning they listened as intently as did the men themselves, not knowing what they were expected to hear; but, on the third morning they understood the cause of the anxious listening, when, booming through the still morning air, came the report of a distant cannon from the direction of San Antonio, and they saw the faces of the men whiten and their jaws come together tightly.

“Was not that a cannon? What does it mean?” Mrs. McNelly inquired, her blanching cheeks telling of the fear in her heart.

“Yes,” Sam McNelly answered, his face hardening, “that was a cannon, Jane; and it means war. That was Colonel Travis telling the world that the fight for the Independence of Texas has begun, that Santa Anna and the Mexican army are even now before San Antonio, that Davy Crockett and all those brave fellows we left behind may be even now fighting for their lives. That is what that cannon shot means, Jane. Colonel Travis promised

to fire a cannon at sunrise when the Mexican army appeared, and to fire one every morning at sunrise as long as the fight continued."

All the little company had crowded around Sam McNelly while he had been speaking, anxiety and dread of what might be happening in the little town they had so recently left showing on every face.

"Oh, if Davy had only come with us!" sobbed Kitty. "I knew he would be killed, if he stayed to fight those wicked Mexicans."

"Never you fear, Kitty," Sam McNelly declared grimly. "Davy ain't dead yet, and he'll take a long time dying. God pity the Greasers that run up against him and that bunch of fighters!"

"Poor brave Mrs. Dickinson and the baby!" grieved Mrs. McNelly. "Seems 'most as if I could feel those dear little arms around my neck now."

"I'll bet Colonel Travis and Davy and Bowie and the rest will make them Mexicans think they have run up against something worse than a billion mad bobcats," Trav asserted, with all a boy's confidence in the prowess of his friends. "My, but I should like to see that fight!"

"Trav!" and his mother looked severely at him. "That fight means killing, the killing of our friends as well as our enemies. How can you speak of wanting to see such a terrible thing!"

"I wasn't thinking of the killing, mother," Trav replied, the light going out of his eyes and the flush in his cheeks whitening. "I was thinking of Davy

and those brave men defying and beating back Santa Anna and the whole Mexican army. "I—I would feel as bad as anybody, if Davy should be killed," and, in spite of his utmost efforts the tears came into his eyes and his voice choked.

"Come, let us hurry to Goliad." There was an unwonted hoarseness in Big Sam McNelly's voice as he spoke. "Fannin will surely go to their help, now that he knows Santa Anna has come, is attacking Travis in the Alamo. Let us hasten with the news to him," and he sprang on the back of his horse—they had been standing near the camp-fire; and a few minutes later the little party were hurrying, as swiftly as horses' legs could take them, on toward Goliad.

All day long they rode, with hardly a pause, saying little, their thoughts on the deadly struggle of the brave men they had left behind and the portentous news they were bearing to Fannin—to the world; and, just as the sun was sinking out of sight behind their backs, they saw, reddening in the last rays of the dying sun, the old Spanish fort and mission of Goliad crowning a little hill, with the squalid huts of logs and mud of the modern town straggling down its sides.

A half an hour later they passed through the heavy wooden doors of the old mission church, which was built just within the walls of the fortification, and on through the church into the compound and barracks within, where Colonel Fannin had his quarters.

CHAPTER XVII

COLONEL FANNIN'S COURIERS

THE moment our little party entered the walled court in front of the barracks, they were instantly surrounded by a crowd of excited officers and men, clamoring for news.

“Seen anything of Santa Anna?”—“How is Travis?”—“Are the Mexies coming?”—“Will Travis fight?”—“Got any terbacco?” were some of the questions poured in from every direction, faster than they could be answered.

“Yes, the Mexicans have come—have attacked Travis. I want Colonel Fannin at once,” and Colonel Bonham jumped from his saddle and handed his bridle reins to a soldier.

“I am Colonel Fannin,” and a soldiery appearing man stepped out from among the officers, and, hurrying up to Bonham, gripped him by the hand. “This is sorry news that you bring, Colonel, but you and your friends are heartily welcome, nevertheless.”

“Colonel Fannin,” and the impulsive Bonham gripped the hand of Fannin with both of his, “Colonel Travis implores you to come to his aid, to the aid of Texas. He—”

"I know—I know," and Colonel Fannin frowned impatiently. "This is not the first message I have had from Colonel Travis imploring me to come to his aid; and God knows I would go willingly enough, if I could. But, where are the horses or mules or even oxen to transport my cannon and other munitions of war? Where is the food for my soldiers? Where is the ammunition for their guns? What good are soldiers without food for their bodies and food for their guns?"

"I don't know—I don't know. May be you're doing the right thing. But, if it was me," and Bonham's face hardened, and his eyes glinted, "I'd go, if I had to have my men drag the cannon, if I had to leave the cannon, if I had but a dozen rounds of ammunition, if I had to half starve to get there, I'd go before I'd leave Travis and his brave fellows back yonder at San Antonio to face the whole Mexican army alone, to be slaughtered like hogs by a horde of butchering Greasers."

"Correct!"

"That's the kind of talk for Texans!"

"On to San Antone! On to the rescue of Travis!"

"Death to Santa Anna and his Mexies!"

"Hurrah for Colonel Bonham!"

"Liberty and Texas forever!"

"Forget the oxen and cannon! Lead us to Travis!"

The men who were near enough to hear Bonham

were greatly moved by his stirring words, and thus shouted their approval. Colonel Fannin flushed, and the obstinate lines on his face hardened.

“Those may be the sentiments of a man, and as such they do you credit,” he said. “But a soldier must be governed by other rules than those of sentiment. It would be worse than folly for me uselessly to sacrifice all these brave men—But, come with me,” and he motioned to the three men, “where we can talk things over more quietly. I wish to do what is best, God knows I wish to do what is best! Captain Horton,” and he turned to an officer standing near, “see that the ladies have the best that our circumstances afford. They must be greatly wearied by their long ride. Your pardon, ladies, for our poor accommodations, but a soldier fares but roughly,” and, bowing to Mrs. McNelly and Kitty, he turned and led the way to his quarters, followed by Colonel Bonham and Sam and Jonas and a number of his officers.

Captain Horton at once conducted Kitty and her mother to the quarters of one of the married officers, and left them there in charge of the women folks. Trav and Tom were told to make themselves at home with the soldiers, which they at once proceeded to do, and soon had a circle of interested men around them, listening to the story of their adventures with Davy Crockett and Bowie and the other heroes with Travis at San Antonio. Just as they had finished their narrative, and while the men

were still making excited and characteristic comments about it, Sam McNelly came out of Colonel Fannin's quarters, and summoned Trav. Both boys arose quickly and hurried to where he stood awaiting them.

"Trav, my son," and big Sam McNelly laid a hand on his boy's shoulder, while his eyes searched with unusual earnestness his face, "Colonel Fannin wants to send an express to the Convention, which meets at Washington, on the Brazos River, March the first. He needs every fighting man in his little army right where he now is; and I told him you would carry his message."

Trav's face suddenly flushed and lighted at these words. At last he was to do something for his beloved Texas!

"You will start," continued his father, his own eyes kindling with pride at the look he saw on his son's face, "a couple of hours before sunrise to-morrow morning; and go direct to Victoria, then to Columbus, and from there to Washington. Fresh horses will be furnished you at Victoria and at Columbus. You—"

"But, am I not going, too?" Tom broke in, unable longer to control his impatience at the thought of his being left behind. "Two heads are better than one, even if one of them is a fool's, as the old saying is; and—and, if anything should happen to one of us, then the other might get through with the message; and 'twould be awful lonesome for Trav to

ride all that distance alone. I can go, can't I, dad?" and he turned eagerly to his father, who had just stepped out of Colonel Fannin's quarters and was walking toward them.

Jonas Gifford did not say anything until he reached Tom's side, then he, too, laid a hand on his son's shoulder and looked earnestly into his face.

"Yes, Tom, you can go," he said, speaking slowly. "For the sake of Texas, you can go. Now, both of you, come with me to Colonel Fannin. He has some instructions that he wishes to give you to-night. Then you must both go to bed at once, and get all the rest you can; for you are to start at three o'clock in the morning, so as to get out of the danger zone around Goliad before daylight, if possible," and he led the way back to where Colonel Fannin still sat in consultation with Colonel Bonham and his officers.

Imagine the feelings of Trav and Tom, when, long before the sun had begun to redden the east the next morning, they stood by their horses' heads in front of Colonel Fannin's quarters, waiting to receive his message and final instructions and to say their good-bys, and you will not wonder that the exultation that lighted their eyes and shone in their faces, when they thought of what they were about to do for Texas, was quickly tempered by the weight of the responsibility thus suddenly thrown upon their young shoulders and the very natural feelings of sorrow at parting with parents and friends under

such circumstances of peril and uncertainty. But there is no need of my attempting to describe to you the feelings of the two lads, as they stood there, booted and spurred and ready to mount, in the chill and the darkness of the early morning. Just imagine yourselves in their situation, boys, and then you will understand just how they felt much more clearly and vividly than the most eloquent pen could tell you. Only, remember, there was not a drop of cowardly or ignoble blood in their veins, and that the white in their faces was not from fear, nor the tears in their eyes, when they said good-by to Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and Sam and Jonas and the rest, from any unmanly weakness.

At this date, 1836, as every boy who has read history and remembers what he reads will know, there was not a foot of telegraph wire nor a rod of railroad in all Texas; and, consequently, no swifter way of sending a letter or message, however urgent, than by horse-legs. In war-time this messenger service, or express, as it was sometimes called, was especially perilous; for, naturally, each contestant was constantly on the lookout to kill or capture the couriers of the other, in order to secure his message and to prevent him from carrying his news to the enemy.

This was the reason why Trav and Tom were to make their early-morning start; for it was altogether possible that some of the scouting parties from Santa Anna's army had already reached the

region of Goliad, and were even then on the lookout for any express that Fannin might send out or that might be sent to him; and Colonel Fannin wisely thought that the time just before daylight would be the safest for the boys to pass through this danger zone.

It was just three o'clock by Captain Horton's watch, when Colonel Fannin came out of his quarters, his letter to the Convention in his hand, and walked quickly up to where Trav and Tom stood.

"Give this to the President of the Convention," he said, handing the letter to Trav. "Warn every Texan that you see that Travis at San Antonio is even now battling with the army of Santa Anna, and bid every man to shoulder his rifle and hasten hither, and bring every beast that he owns capable of pulling a load with him. I will remain here for two or three days, to collect supplies and animals to pull my cannon, and then hurry to the aid of Travis. A speedy delivery of your message is of the utmost importance. You ride for Texas. Do not spare your horses. Get fresh horses at Victoria, at Columbus, wherever you can; and ride night and day until you reach Washington. Now, may the God of Liberty protect you! Good-by," and he gripped each boy by the hand.

Without a word, they had already said their good-bys to the little group of dear ones who had gathered to see them off, the two boys sprang into their saddles, the gates of the fort swung open, and they

were off, leaving behind them Kitty and her mother sobbing in each other's arms and Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford gripping strongly each other's hands.

CHAPTER XVIII

A GREAT RIDE FOR TEXAS

VICTORIA, the first settlement the boys would reach, is about twenty-five miles east of Goliad; and the road thither was considered the most dangerous part of their journey, for here, if anywhere, it was thought the Mexicans would be on the watch to prevent Fannin from sending out news of his situation or of the coming of Santa Anna and his army. Therefore, Trav and Tom felt that the worst of their dangers would be over, if they could get safely through this region and reach Victoria undetected by the Mexicans.

"You keep a sharp lookout ahead and to your left, Tom," Trav said, as they galloped down the hill, through the streets of the sleeping town, and out onto the broad prairie beyond. "I will watch the country ahead and to the right. We must not be caught napping."

"All right," Tom replied. "Say, this is going to be a great ride! Makes a fellow feel like a man to be trusted with such grave responsibilities and to face such great dangers all alone."

"Yes, and we mustn't forget to act like men," Trav warned. "We can't talk and keep a sharp

lookout all around at the same time, so I reckon we'd better cut out the talk, as Davy would say, at least until after we've reached Victoria. My, but I should like to have Davy Crockett with us! Not that I am afraid," he added quickly; "but Davy is such good company, and he always knows just what to do, no matter how great the danger is."

"So would I," Tom agreed heartily. "Davy seems to have eyes all around his head, and we've only got two and both of them in front."

"Well, I'm thinking we'd better use the two we've got more and our tongues less," Trav cautioned, resolutely closing his own mouth and giving his whole attention to the country through which they were riding.

For an hour after this the two boys galloped steadily eastward, neither speaking a word, but both keeping their keen young eyes constantly searching the road ahead and the country on either side. There was no moon, but the stars shone with wonderful brilliancy in the clear cold skies, and gave them sufficient light to follow the well-worn trail over the level prairie as swiftly as their horses could carry them. At the end of the hour the country became more hilly and wooded; and, on the summit of one of these hills, the boys paused to give their horses a few moments' breathing, while their eyes searched carefully the country ahead.

"Look!" Tom suddenly exclaimed, pointing to a

little clump of trees that grew in the hollow of the valley half a mile beyond where they sat. "Isn't that a light shining through them trees," and his eyes glinted with excitement. "Someone must be camping there, and it's the light from their camp-fire that we see."

"Yes," Trav agreed. "It must be a camp-fire; and we'd better get off the top of this hill, where we can be seen for a long ways, as quickly as we can. Ride careful, so as not to make any more noise than you can help, and follow me," and he started down the hill toward the dark shadows of a little grove of oak trees that grew at its foot.

When the boys reached the trees, they stopped their horses, and sat for a minute or two and listened as intently as possible. Not a suspicious sound reached their ears.

"What if it is Mexicans sent to watch the trail?" Trav spoke very low and kept his eyes on the clump of trees. "They might have seen us when we were on the top of that hill. It was foolish for us to stop there."

"We must find out who they are," Tom declared. "If they are Mexicans, we want to know it, so as to be on our guard, and to be sure they don't get on our trail."

"You're right," Trav assented. "We must know whether that fire means friends or enemies. You stay here and guard the horses, and I'll creep up the bed of that gully there and find out," and he

pointed to a shallow channel, worn through the soil by the heavy falls of rain that sometimes flooded the land in that region, and apparently running directly to the clump of trees where the light showed. "It is deep enough to hide me," and he jumped from his saddle and handed his bridle rein to Tom, who had also sprung to the ground. "Better lead the horses out of sight among the trees. Now, keep your ears and eyes both open. I won't be gone long," and Trav dropped down into the gully, which ran only a few feet from where he had been standing.

The bed of the gully was dry and from four to ten feet deep, affording Trav secure concealment; and, in less than a minute after he entered its channel, he had vanished from the sight of Tom as completely as if the earth had swallowed him.

For a couple of minutes Tom stood motionless, holding the reins of the horses with one hand and his rifle with the other and keeping his eyes on the spot where Trav had disappeared, then he cautiously led the horses back farther into the woods and stopped in a little opening underneath a huge tree, curtained round with the black shadows of night, and anxiously awaited the return of Trav. Fifteen minutes—twenty minutes—half an hour passed. It seemed like hours to the waiting boy. He began to get uneasy, began to wonder if something might not have happened to Trav. Possibly he had been captured—killed.

There is nothing more trying to the most steadfast nerves than thus, alone in the darkness and mystery of night, to await the return of a comrade gone on some perilous venture—and Tom was but a boy. The minutes pass like hours. A thousand frightful apprehensions assail the mind. The nerves are strung to the highest possible tension. Every unusual sound makes the heart jump. The eyes are constantly straining to pierce the mystery of the surrounding darkness, the ears to catch the first suspicious sound of approaching danger, the muscles to be ready for the instant spring should the danger attack.

Thus it was with Tom, as he stood there in the darkness underneath the great tree, holding the reins of the horses tightly with one hand, gripping his rifle with the other, every sense alert, every nerve strung to its tightest tension, listening—looking for the first sound or sight of his returning comrade, or approaching danger, fervently hoping that no serious trouble had befallen him, yet constantly fearing that he might be even at that moment in the most deadly peril.

A twig cracked but a few yards away. It might be Trav returning—it might be an enemy creeping upon him in the darkness—it might be only a night animal moving through the underbrush. He longed to call out, but dared not. He strained his eyes in the direction of the sound, but could see

nothing but the dark shadows of trees and brush. Something moved behind him—close to him.

“Trav! Trav!” he called softly, turning quickly, his rifle ready.

A great black thing, like the wing of a monstrous bat, leaped out from behind a tree not two feet in front of him, and fell over his head and shoulders, and enveloped his arms and body; and, before he could lift his rifle or raise an arm in self-defense, he was vainly struggling in the thick folds of a Mexican blanket, and the two horses, snorting with fright, were galloping through the woods.

“Now, lie still, you young wildcat, or I’ll poke six inches of sharp steel atween your ribs,” breathed a heavy voice close to Tom’s ears, while he felt a pair of huge arms encircling his body, with a force that told him how vain it would be for him to struggle.

“Ever heered tell of Big Ike, the Red Terror of Texas?” the voice continued. “Wal, you’re in his clutches right now, so jest hold your hosses, or—”

A sound like the cracking of a cocoanut reached Tom’s ears, the great arms around his body suddenly relaxed, and, the next moment, the breath was nearly crushed out of his lungs by the weight of a huge body falling on top of him.

“Tom! Tom! Are you hurt?” and Trav in a frenzy of excitement roughly pulled the body of Big Ike off Tom, and began tearing at the blanket.

“No—no—n-o-t a-bit,” gasped Tom, struggling

to his feet. "How—where—what has happened?" and he stared at the huge bulk of Big Ike lying at his feet—"Oh, you soaked him one on the head! Bully for you, Trav!" and he looked understandingly and admiringly from the body to Trav.

"Quick," and Trav bent over Big Ike and pulled his two great hands together behind his back, "cut some strips out of that blanket. We must have him tied hand and foot before he comes to, or we'll have an elephant on our hands sure enough."

Tom needed no second bidding; and five minutes later Big Ike lay on his back, his hands and feet securely bound and a huge wad of the blanket tightly stuffed into his mouth. Not until this had been safely accomplished, did either boy speak, then Tom turned to Trav.

"Why, it must be that big red-headed bully that Davy knocked down in that fandango hall in San Antonio," he said. "He called himself Big Ike."

"And tried to shoot the toes off my feet," and Trav glared down at the man. "Well, I reckon, that thump I gave him on the head will more than even matters up between us— Tom," and he caught hold of his companion by the shoulder and bent close to him, "I saw Vasquez standing by that camp-fire over in the woods, and a dozen other Mexicans and white desperadoes lying on the ground around it, and Big Ike must have come from them, must have been on the watch and saw us when we

were on the top of the hill, and then crept up, thinking to capture you first and then to capture me when I got back— But, where are the horses?” and Trav started around in alarm.

In their excitement both boys for the moment had forgotten all about the horses; but now, with a great sinking of their hearts, they realized what a terrible misfortune the loss of the horses would be to them, and the need of recapturing them if possible.

“We must get them back, we must,” and Tom looked frantically around. “How can we carry Fannin’s letter to the Convention, if we don’t? Come, let us see if we can’t find them. Maybe they did not run far,” and he started off to look for the horses.

“Wait, we must make sure that this fellow does not get loose,” and Trav bent over Big Ike, who had now recovered his senses, and was glaring furiously at the boys, and carefully examined his bonds.

He found every knot tight and every bond secure; and, leaving Big Ike to meditate alone on the uncertainties of life, the two boys hurried away through the woods in the direction the horses had taken. Before they had gone twenty rods they heard one of the horses nicker; and, in another minute, they found the animal securely held by its bridle-rein, which had fortunately caught on a

strong limb. The other horse, unwilling to leave his companion, stood only a short distance away and was soon captured.

"This is sure a breeze of luck, as Davy would say," Trav declared, as he led his horse up to where Tom stood holding his horse. "But," and the look of anxiety deepened on his face, "what shall we do now? I am sure Vasquez is planning some new devilment against father, and we ought to warn him; but we can't. We are couriers of Texas, and must ride on. We've already delayed longer than we ought. Come, we'll have to ride round that camp," and Trav sprang on the back of his horse.

"But, what shall we do with Big Ike?" Tom asked, as he jumped into his saddle.

"Leave him where he is," Trav rejoined. "He can't get away, and there's mighty little chance of his being found and released until we're miles away and out of reach of his vengeance. Besides it will do him a sight of good to lay there and chew the rag for three or four hours, and me a sight more good to know that that's what he's doing," and Trav chuckled. "But I do wish we could go back and warn father of Vasquez," and he looked longingly back toward Goliad.

"Well, we can't," Tom retorted a bit impatiently, "and the farther we get away from Vasquez and his band of desperadoes before daylight the better I'll like it. Let's be moving."

For half an hour after this neither lad spoke a

word, as they cautiously circled round the little grove where burned the camp-fire of Vasquez; but, at the end of that time, the camp-fire was a couple of miles behind them and they were back on the road to Victoria, galloping on their mission as swiftly as their horses' legs could carry them.

The sun came up, and still they galloped on, without seeing a sign of human life. Later they passed a number of the log cabins of lonely settlers. At each they paused long enough to shout: "Santa Anna and the Mexican army are attacking Travis in the Alamo! Get your women folks to a place of safety and hurry to his rescue!" Then, on they would gallop, without waiting to see the effect of their words.

A little before ten o'clock they rode into Victoria, their horses covered with sweat and foam and so exhausted they could hardly bear their riders, and halted in the plaza.

"Messengers to the Convention from Colonel Fannin!" shouted Trav to the crowd of excited men and women and children that quickly gathered round them. "Get us fresh horses at once, the swiftest you have! Travis and his men in the Alamo at San Antonio are fighting the whole Mexican army! Shoulder your rifles, men, and hurry to Colonel Fannin at Goliad to march with him to his rescue!"

In five minutes two fresh horses were ready for the boys, in three minutes more their saddles and

bridles were on the new mounts, and in another minute they were galloping out of Victoria on the road to Columbus, leaving behind them a town full of excited men, women and children.

Hour after hour they rode, pausing at noontime to eat their lunch and to give their horses a feed and a brief rest; and then on again, all through the long afternoon, shouting out their warning of the coming of Santa Anna at every settler's house they passed, but never stopping themselves, on until the sun went down and the stars came out and the gallant little beasts beneath them were almost ready to drop with weariness.

At nine o'clock that night they rode into Columbus, the boys so weary they could hardly sit in their saddles and their horses staggering with exhaustion. Since three o'clock that morning they had ridden over seventy-five miles, and they had some thirty miles yet to ride before they would dare stop for rest or sleep.

Here again the news of the coming of the Mexican army, of the fighting at the Alamo, threw the whole town into the wildest turmoil of excitement. And no wonder; for, if Travis should surrender, if Fannin should be conquered, then nothing but a few leagues of undefended country would lie between them and the brutal hordes of Santa Anna's army. Women turned white and clutched at their hearts at the horrible thought, and the faces of the

men hardened and straightway they began examining their weapons and preparing for war.

Never before in all their young lives had Trav and Tom been as tired and sleepy as they were when they rode into Columbus; but, they were riding for Texas, and absolutely refused to stop longer than was necessary to eat the meal that kind hands quickly set before them. In half an hour, mounted on fresh horses, they were again galloping through the darkness, with only thirty miles left between them and their destination.

At three o'clock the next morning, Richard Ellis, President of the Convention then in session at Washington on the Brazos, was routed out of his sleep, and told that two boys, covered with the dust and grime of a long ride and so weak from exhaustion that they could hardly stand, demanded to see him immediately. He instantly bade that they be brought to his bedroom; and, a few minutes later, Trav and Tom staggered into his room, their faces and bodies covered with dust and their limbs trembling with weariness.

"From Colonel Fannin at Goliad, sir," and Trav straightened up, and, thrusting his hand into his bosom, drew out Colonel Fannin's letter, and handed it to Mr. Ellis.

Richard Ellis seized the letter, tore it open, and swiftly read it, uttering sharp exclamations as he read.

“And you two boys have brought this message from Goliad since yesterday morning?” and he glanced from the letter sharply at Trav and Tom.

“Yes, sir,” Trav answered. “And please do something to help Colonel Travis and Davy Crockett? You see we know Davy Crockett; and there are so few Texans in the Alamo and so many Mexicans attacking it, that even men like Davy Crockett can’t fight them off long without help, and, if they’re not helped, they will all be killed.”

“My brave boys,” and Ellis reached out and gripped the hand of each lad, “I—the Convention—Texas thanks you. You have made a great ride, a great ride,” he repeated, his eyes kindling. “And all that the Convention can do, I promise you, we will do to save Travis— But—why you’re almost ready to drop with fatigue! And no wonder! Here, Bill, Red, here!” he called. “Get these two boys into my bed as quick as you can— Never mind the dirt. Off with their clothing and into the bed with them,” and out of the bed he sprang and began hurriedly putting on his clothes. “When they wake up, and want something to eat, stuff them, stuff them, mind you, with the best there is in the house. Now, I’m off to hunt up Sam Houston,” and, buttoning up his clothes as he went, he rushed out of the room.

All of the little remaining strength of will and body seemed suddenly to leave Trav and Tom the moment they had safely delivered their message;

and, too exhausted and sleepy to make even a move to take off their own garments, they were undressed and placed in the bed by the two men Ellis had summoned, both lads falling sound asleep before the bedclothes could be pulled up over them.

The great ride for Texas was ended.

CHAPTER XIX

THREE LETTERS

NOT until four o'clock in the afternoon did Trav and Tom awake; and then it seemed to the two boys as if the Mammoth Cave had been suddenly transported to the regions usually occupied by their stomachs. Never before had they been so hungry; and never before had they had such a meal set before them!

They found the little town of Washington a-buzz with excitement. That had been a great day for Texas! for on that day, the second of March, eighteen hundred and thirty-six, the Convention had adopted a Declaration of Independence, declaring Texas a free and independent state and severing forever the galling bonds that heretofore had bound her to Mexico. Men marched up and down the streets shouting and hurraing for the new Republic of Texas, until they were too hoarse to utter another sound. At night the whole town blazed with huge bonfires. But, throughout all this excitement and rejoicing there ran an undernote of anxiety, of dread. Men gathered in knots and spoke in low tones of Travis and his heroes at the Alamo, of Santa Anna and his army, of his taunting

boasts that he would make all Texas a howling wilderness. Women turned pale and glanced shudderingly toward their children, at the sound of the hated name of Santa Anna or the thought of his Mexican soldiery. There was excited talk of marching to the rescue of Travis; but there was no army to march; and an army large enough to meet the thousands of Santa Anna could not be organized and equipped in a day or two.

Trav and Tom found that their ride had made heroes of them. They were warmly greeted wherever they went. The next day they were summoned to the Convention and told their story to its members; and on that day they heard read to the Convention the famous letter of Colonel Travis appealing "to the people of Texas and all Americans in the world." The stirring words of the appeal rang like bugle notes in the heart of every man in the Convention; but to Trav and Tom the letter came almost with the force of a personal appeal. As they listened they seemed to see the tall form of Colonel Travis, and to hear the words falling from his lips. Had it been possible, they would have gladly seized their rifles and rushed to his aid, without a thought of what their own fate might be; and their hearts were not the only hearts that the letter had fired with a like patriotism.

And no wonder that the letter stirred the heart and moved the soul and made the hand of Anglo-American manhood feel like gripping the rifle and

rushing to the Alamo to the aid of Travis; for this is how the heroic appeal—it has been called the most heroic document among American historical records—read:

COMMANDANCY OF THE ALAMO,
BEXAR, February 24th, 1836.

*To the People of Texas and all Americans in the
World:*

FELLOW CITIZENS AND COMPATRIOTS:—I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment and cannonade for 24 hours and have not lost a man. The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion, otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken. I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. *I shall never surrender or retreat.* Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch. The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily and will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor and that of his country. VICTORY or DEATH.

WILLIAM BARRETT TRAVIS.

Lt. Col. Comdt.

P. S. The Lord is on our side. When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn. We have since found in a deserted house 80 or 90 bushels and got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves.

TRAVIS.

But, as much as this letter stirred the Convention and the people, nothing definite, nothing positive was done to aid Travis. Perhaps nothing could have been done in the then disorganized condition of affairs; but to Trav and Tom, whose hearts bled for Davy Crockett, for Colonel Travis and his noble band of heroes, this seeming inactivity was beyond comprehension. However, they were only two boys who could not be expected to know that the machinery of state must be adjusted before it could be put into motion.

A couple of days passed, days of the keenest anxiety to Trav and Tom, to all the people, and then, on Sunday, March 6th, word went through the town that another express had just come from Travis, with letters to the Convention.

Trav and Tom were sitting in their room when the news reached them. They instantly seized their hats and rushed to the Hall of the Convention. The President was already in his chair, the members in their seats, while an excited crowd of men and women spectators filled the Hall.

The President arose, and, in the hush that followed, announced that there had just come to him

by express a document of "the most important character ever received by any assembly of men"; and then he read a letter from Colonel Travis, which you may here read, in order that you may understand with what intense interest Trav and Tom listened to this message from these imperiled men, every one of whom they knew and honored.

The letter was dated March 3, 1836, and directed to the President of the Convention. It read:

"From the 25th to the present date, the enemy have kept up a heavy bombardment on all sides. Notwithstanding all this, a company of thirty-two men from Gonzales made their way into us on the morning of the first (March), at 3 o'clock, and Colonel Bonham (a courier sent to Goliad) got in this morning. I have so fortified this place, that the walls are generally proof against cannon balls, and I still continue to entrench on the inside, and strengthen the walls by throwing up dirt. At least two hundred shells have fallen inside our works without having injured a man; indeed, we have been so fortunate as not to have lost a man from any cause, and we have killed many of the enemy. The spirits of my men are still high, although they have had much to depress them. We have contended for ten days against an enemy whose numbers are variously estimated at from 1,500 to 6,000 men, with General Sezema and Colonel Batres, the aids-de-camp of Santa Anna, at

their head. A reinforcement of about 2,000 men is now entering Bexar from the west, and I think it more than probable Santa Anna is in town, from the rejoicing I hear. Colonel Fannin is said to be on the march to this place with reinforcements, but I fear it is not true, as I have repeatedly sent to him for aid without receiving any. Colonel Bonham, my special messenger, arrived at La Bahia (Goliad) fourteen days ago with a request for aid, and, on the entrance of the enemy into Bexar (San Antonio), ten days ago, I sent an express to Colonel Fannin, which arrived at Goliad next day, urging him to send us reinforcements. None have yet arrived. I look to the Colonies alone for aid, and, unless it arrives soon, I shall have to fight the enemy on his own terms. I feel confident that the determined valor and desperate courage heretofore evinced by my men will not fail them in the last struggle; and, although they may be sacrificed to the vengeance of a Gothic enemy, the victory will cost so dear, that it will be worse than a defeat.

“God and Texas! Victory or Death!”

In the death-like silence that followed the reading of this letter a friend of Colonel Travis arose, and said that he, also, had received a letter from Colonel Travis, parts of which he thought might be of interest to the Convention to hear read.

The President of the Convention promptly bade him read the letter; and again you can listen with Trav and Tom.

This letter was also dated March 3d; and the parts read were as follows:

“I am still here in fine spirits. With 145 men I have held this place ten days against forces variously estimated at 1,500 to 6,000; and I shall continue to hold it until I get relief from my countrymen, or I will perish in its defense. Let the Convention go and make a Declaration of Independence, and we will then understand and the world will understand, what we are fighting for. If independence is not declared, I shall lay down my arms, and so will the men under my command. But under the flag of independence we are ready to peril our lives a hundred times a day, and to dare the monster who is fighting us under a blood-red flag, threatening to murder all prisoners and to make Texas a waste desert. I shall fight the enemy on his own terms; yet I am ready to do it, and if my countrymen do not rally to my relief, I am determined to perish in the defense of this place, and my bones shall reproach my country for her neglect. With 500 men more, I will drive Sezema beyond the Rio Grande, and I will visit vengeance on the enemies of Texas.”

The effect of the reading of these two letters on the Convention, on the people, was electrical. The patriotic fervor, the devoted courage, the noble despair that breathed in every line of the heroic appeals thrilled, like bugle calls to battle, through

every heart present. In the midst of the most intense excitement, Robert Potter, a delegate, arose and moved that "the Convention do immediately adjourn, arm, and march to the relief of the Alamo."

At this moment the tall form of Sam Houston rose from his seat, his square-chinned, massive face and glowing eyes aflame with the emotions kindled by the heroic appeal of Travis; and yet he rose to oppose the motion, more, to denounce it as madness, as treason to the people, who had sent them there not only to declare their Independence of Mexico, but also to organize a government, without which they would only be outlaws among the nations of the world and could neither hope for the sympathy nor the respect of mankind. He warned the Convention of the peril of such actions to the country. He advised them calmly to continue their deliberations, bravely and patriotically and wisely, to organize the government, in order that all the world might know that Texas was ruled by statesmen and not by a mob, however patriotic and brave the mob might be. He pledged himself to go instantly to Gonzales, where he was told a small body of armed settlers had gathered, place himself at their head, rally to his support every man possible, and, if mortal power could avail, to rescue the brave men in the Alamo.

His eloquence, his logic, the magnetism of his remarkable personality, almost instantly stilled the

tumult, and transformed what the moment before had promised to become a mob into a body of reasoning men. He spoke for nearly an hour; and the moment he stopped speaking, confident that his eloquence had had the desired effect, he walked out of the Convention and prepared to start immediately for Gonzales on his way to the Alamo.

The reading of the two letters and the impassionate eloquence of Houston had greatly moved Trav and Tom, and the moment he left the Hall of the Convention they hurried out after him, determined, if possible, to go with him to Gonzales and to the rescue of Travis. As they passed through the door a hunter, roughly dressed and travel-stained, caught hold of Trav's arm.

"Be you Trav McNelly, son of Sam McNelly?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," Trav answered quickly, his face whitening, for instantly his thoughts had gone in fear to his mother and Kitty. "What is it? What has happened?"

"Jest a bit of Mexican devilment," scowled the hunter. "But, I reckon, you bein' Trav McNelly, son of Sam McNelly, this note'll give you th' information wanted," and he thrust his hand into the bosom of his greasy deerskin shirt, pulled out a soiled letter and handed it to Trav.

Trav tore the letter open and read:

"DEAR SON—That Greaser villain, Vasquez, has got Kitty. Your mother is sick. Can't get away

from Goliad as planned. Return to Goliad at once. Jonas says for Tom to come with you.

“SAM McNELLY.”

Evidently Sam McNelly was more accustomed to handling the rifle than the pen; but, brief as was the letter, it told Trav sufficient. He could read between the lines the agony—the dread, a more gifted pen might have put into words. For an instant he stood glaring wildly at the paper trembling in his hands, then he handed it to Tom and turned to the hunter.

“How—when did this happen?” and Trav in his agitation caught hold of the hunter’s sleeve.

“Wal, if you’re meanin’ th’ stealin’ of th’ gal by th’ Mexies,” the hunter answered, “’twas th’ day you left. ’Bout th’ middle of th’ afternoon a big red-headed giant of a fellow comed ridin’ in, an’ said as how one of you boys had met up with a bad accident, broke a leg or somethin’ by his hoss stumblin’, ’bout halfway atween Goliad an’ Victoria, an’ was lyin’ thar on th’ ground, an’ wanted his dad tew come after him with a litter. Said ’tother one of you boys had gone on, ’cause he was carryin’ an important message. Of course your dads, both on ’em, started at once, an’ Mrs. McNelly was bound tew go tew, but they left th’ gal. Colonel Fannin sent an escort ’long tew perreck ’em from th’ Mexies. Wal, ’long ’bout an hour after they’d gone, back comes th’ big red-headed fellow, an’ says

as how he'd been sent after th' gal by her paw and maw; an' of course, bein' none suspicious, Colonel Fannin allowed th' gal tew ride off with him, an' nobody ain't seen nothin' of her since."

"But, what of dad and mother? Did—did anything happen to them?" and Trav's eyes searched the hunter's face imploringly.

"Naw; they got back th' next day, having ridden clean through tew Victoria without findin' no boy with a broken leg; an' thar, larnin' that you boys had both gone through th' town a-flyin' th' day afore, they suspicioned somethin' was wrong an' hurried back as fast as hoss legs could bring 'em. That was th' fust Colonel Fannin an' th' rest on us knowed th' gal was stolen, we supposin' she was with her dad an' maw. Th' next mornin' Sam McNelly found a Mexican dagger, pinnin' a paper tew th' door of th' house in which he slept and on the paper was writ somethin' 'bout crackin' Mexican skulls with bare fists, an' Mexican vengeance, an' sayin' that th' gal was now th' writer's slave an' would never see her dad an' maw agin' an' th' paper was signed Vasquez. That's what I call a low-down, dirty, mean, cowardly Greaser trick," and the honest hunter's face flushed with indignation.

"Thank you for bringing the message," Trav said, his white lips closing very tightly together. "But now we must get back to Goliad—to dad and mother—just as soon as we can."

"Then you'd better go 'long with General Sam

as far as Gonzales," admonished the hunter. "An' if you're a-goin' with him you'd better be gettin' some lively moves on you, 'cause Sam Houston's worse than a prairie afire, when he gets a hustle on."

"I reckon you're right," Trav answered, his face showing how deeply the news of the hunter affected him. "Come on, Tom," and both boys started on the run for the quarters of General Sam Houston.

CHAPTER XX

“THE ALAMO HAS FALLEN”

GENERAL HOUSTON, when Trav and Tom reached his quarters, was in the midst of an excited and rapidly moving throng of servants, all busily engaged in getting everything in readiness for his immediate departure; but he paused long enough to listen to their story.

“Yes, you can ride with me,” he said, the moment Trav had told what they wanted and why. “And I’d go with you myself after that villainous Mexican, if even greater wrongs than yours did not demand my immediate attention. Now, get yourselves on the backs of your horses as speedily as possible, for I start in half an hour, and, by the eternal, I would not wait a moment for the President of the United States himself. That bungling conglomeration of assurance and imbecility, the Council, have already waited too long,” and, with an angry frown on his flushed countenance, he turned abruptly from the boys to hustle the preparations for his departure.

In less than the half an hour Trav and Tom were back, mounted on their horses, their rifles in their hands, fully equipped for the journey. They found

Colonel George W. Hockley, Houston's chief of staff, and one or two other men, sitting on their horses armed and ready to follow General Houston—all that cared to undertake the desperate venture. Ten minutes later the little company, with Sam Houston at their head, galloped swiftly out of Washington, and turned their horses westward toward Gonzales.

Gonzales, then the western outpost of Anglo-American civilization, is situated something over a hundred miles southwest of Washington, on the west bank of the Guadalupe River. The road thither was through a wilderness of plains and forests and over steep hills and across bridgeless rivers. Houston and his little party rode as swiftly as possible; but it was not until March the eleventh, five days after leaving Washington, that they rode into Gonzales.

They found the little town in the greatest excitement.

"The Alamo has fallen! Travis and his men have all been murdered!" were almost the first words they heard.

"How do you know? Who brings the news?" and Houston's face whitened to the lips.

"The Mexican, Antonio Borgaro, he comes direct from San Antonio. Says that every human being in the Alamo was slaughtered, except a woman and her child and a negro; that the cussed Mexicans then dragged out all the dead bodies, threw them

all together in a great pile mixed with wood, and burnt them all to ashes."

"By all the thunders of the great Jove, if this is true," and Houston's eyes flamed and his strong jaws clicked as they came together, "I'll make Santa Anna—Mexico—pay dearly for every drop of the heroic blood of the brave Travis and his men shed by this Mexican monster, every drop—send the Mexican to me at once," and, springing off his horse, General Houston hurried into the house, where he was to make his headquarters while in Gonzales.

"Oh, it can't be true, it can't be true! Davy Crockett and Travis and Bowie and all those brave men killed! It can't be true!" Travis mourned, the horror of it all making his head reel and his muscles so weak that he could hardly stand. "Tell me it is not true," and he turned his white face appealingly to the men who had quickly gathered round as soon as it was known that General Houston had arrived. "I—we knew Davy Crockett."

"I am sure we are all hoping it is not true," one of the men answered; "but I fear our hoping will be vain. Not that we're depending on the Mexican's story alone—Mexicans are borned liars; but none of our scouts has heard Travis's sunrise gun, which he was to fire every morning as long as he held out, since last Sunday, and that was the day Antonio says the Alamo was captured and Travis

and all his men killed. So, putting the two together, we fear there is not much hope for Travis and his brave men. But,” and his face hardened, “just wait until we get a chance back at Santa Anna, and we’ll make him remember the Alamo, won’t we, men?”

There was something of the growl of a lion in the response of the men, while the fingers of many a man standing there tightened, as if they already felt the avenging rifle barrel or haft of knife in their grip.

At this moment a messenger came from General Houston, summoning the two boys at once into his presence.

General Houston, when the boys entered, was striding back and forth across the room, like an angry tiger in his cage, muttering and growling disjointed sentences to himself. Near the door stood the cowering form of the Mexican, who had brought the news of the massacre, at the Alamo, his black eyes fixed in awe and fear on the giant frame and perturbed countenance of Houston. For a minute or more General Houston appeared not to notice the two boys, then he stopped suddenly in front of them.

“Are you still determined to go to Goliad?” he asked abruptly. “The road thither may be overrun by Mexicans by this time, and they give no quarter.”

"We must go. Father—mother—Kitty—" Trav's voice choked at the thought of Kitty—"need us. We must go, Mexicans or no Mexicans."

"Spoken like true sons of Texas," and the keen eyes of Houston rested admiringly on the faces of the two brave boys. "You shall go. You shall be my couriers to Fannin. If the Alamo has fallen, Goliad is no safe place for him and his little army. He must blow up the fort and retreat to Victoria; and you shall bear my orders to him to that effect. Be prepared to start by early sunrise. The best horses in the place shall be at your service and I will order one of the scouts, who knows the country between here and Goliad well, to go with you. Now," and he gripped the palm of each boy in one of his strong, muscular hands, "I have much to do and must say good night to you. I will see you in the morning, and will have my despatches to Fannin ready by sunrise. Now, go."

"But, do you—do you believe this horrible thing about Travis and all his men being killed in the Alamo?" and Trav's eyes searched almost beseechingly the face of General Houston. "It seems too—too awful to be true. You know Davy Crockett was there."

In an instant the angry storm-clouds, that had cleared away during his few words to the boys, swept back across the countenance of Houston, and the fire flashed back into his eyes.

"Nearly two hundred of the bravest men in all Texas sacrificed, needlessly sacrificed to the incompetency and imbecile arrogance of the Council!" he raged, beginning again to pace rapidly back and forth across the room. "Travis should have been supported, should have had back of him a thousand instead of less than two hundred men, or he should never have been sent to hold the Alamo against the army of Santa Anna. But," and to the two boys the glorious eyes of Houston seemed fairly to flame, "the sacrifice shall not have been made in vain. The news of the heroic struggle and the glorious deaths of the heroes of the Alamo will sound in the ears of every Texan worthy of the name like bugle calls to battle! The horrible butchery will arouse the indignation of the nations of the world! It was the last stroke of Mexican cruelty and oppression needed to sever forever the chain that bound Texas to Mexico! Texas must and shall be free!"

For the instant he seemed to have forgotten the two boys, the appealing question of Trav, the Mexican cowering by the door. Like one inspired he looked and spake, forgetful of all his present surroundings.

Then, in the midst of this exaltation, there suddenly sounded, loud and imperative, a rap on the door; and Colonel Hockley, Houston's chief of staff, threw the door open and entered, a look of unspeakable horror and wrath on his white face.

"It is true! It is true!" he cried. "Travis and

all of his men have been butchered and their bodies burned. Mrs. Dickinson, Lieutenant Dickinson's wife, has just come in from San Antonio, sent by Santa Anna himself with a proclamation of pardon to all insurgents who will lay down their arms and swear allegiance to Mexico. Every man of them was butchered. She and her baby and a negro boy were all the fiends left alive in the Alamo. Santa Anna and five thousand soldiers are advancing by forced marches upon Gonzales. We—"

"Bring her, bring her here at once," interrupted Houston peremptorily.

Colonel Hockley, with a glance at his chief, whirled on his heels and shot out of the door.

Trav and Tom, sick with horror, their last hope gone, waited the coming of Mrs. Dickinson. General Houston, with tightly compressed lips, continued to pace up and down the room. The Mexican, with a final glance at the face of the general, slunk out of the room and vanished. From outside came the wailing cries of women—twenty wives in Gonzales were made widows by the slaughter at the Alamo—and the sounds of a wild tumult, growing louder and coming nearer. Then the door was again thrown open, and a woman, holding tightly in her arms a little girl, staggered in, followed by Colonel Hockley and a negro boy, in whom Trav and Tom at once recognized the negro servant of Colonel Travis—all that were left of that gallant band, the bravest of the brave, who had gathered

round the huge camp-fire in the plaza of San Antonio, on that now never to be forgotten night, when, for the last time, they had looked upon the loved faces and stalwart forms of Davy Crockett and Will Travis and Jim Bowie and their heroic comrades, all alight in the glory of the red fire-light.

Trav and Tom were horror-stricken by the emaciated face and form of Mrs. Dickinson. Her eyes looked twice their natural size and burned in their sunken sockets like coals of fire. No need for her tongue to tell that she had been looking upon things unutterable.

“General Houston,” and the unfortunate woman stepped directly in front of Houston and fixed her dry, burning eyes on his face, “my baby and I are all that are left, all that are left, all that are left! Travis, Bowie, Crockett—not a man of them is left alive! Oh, my noble husband! My brave husband! My fatherless babe! Dead, dead, all are dead!”

“Lady, my brave lady,” there was infinite tenderness in Houston’s voice as he spoke and the loving gentleness of a father was in the hand he laid on the head of the anguish-wrung woman before him, “the heart of Texas, of the world bleeds with yours to-day. But, now, for your child’s sake,” and softly his hand passed from her head to the head of the sleeping girl in her arms, “you must eat and rest; and then you will tell me the story of these heroic

men and their glorious deaths. Come, lady, I will conduct you to where you can find food and rest," and gently, very gently and tenderly he lifted the baby girl from her arms into his, slipped her arm through his, and, like a king conducting a distressed queen, led her from the room to the comforting arms and sympathetic hearts of the women of the household.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOST HEROIC FIGHT IN AMERICA

TWO hours later Trav and Tom were summoned to the private room of General Houston to hear from the lips of Mrs. Dickinson the story of the fall of the Alamo. They found Colonel Hockley and a number of officers and prominent men of Gonzales already there, sitting in a half circle in front of an easy chair, in which sat Mrs. Dickinson, with General Houston by her side. On a lounge near by lay her baby daughter, still sleeping soundly.

Mrs. Dickinson was no longer hysterical, and spoke calmly and reasonably, but the fires still burned in her dry eyes and her lips were drawn and white. She smiled wanly, when she saw Trav and Tom, and shook hands with each, and greeted them with a few brief sentences; but she spoke no words of inquiry about Mrs. McNelly, nor Kitty, nor any of the others. She was dead to everything but her great sorrow.

Trav and Tom made no attempt to speak a word of consolation—what could they say?—but silently clasped her hand, and then seated themselves.

“Now, lady,” and General Houston inclined his

head gently to Mrs. Dickinson, "we would know how those noble heroes died. Speak freely. You are in the midst of the most sympathetic friends; for everyone present had dear relatives or loved friends with brave Travis in the Alamo, and we would know how gloriously they died."

For two or three minutes Mrs. Dickinson sat silent, her eyes staring steadfastly at her hands clasped together in her lap, then, without lifting her eyes or unclasping her hands, she spoke.

"On the morning of the twenty-second of February," she began, speaking slowly and in a monotonous undertone, "my husband told me that Colonel Travis was too careless, that scouts should be kept out constantly on the watch for the coming of the Mexican army, but no one imagined that Santa Anna was so near. Only a day or two before a rumor had reached us that the Mexican army was at hand, and Colonel Travis at once had sent out scouts, who returned without having found a sign of the Mexicans. This made us all feel so secure, at least for a few days, that no scouts were kept out and only the sentinels on the roof of the church left on guard. It was the thought of his wife and child that made my husband cautious.

"That day I visited at the home of a Mexican woman, who lived not far from the church on whose roof the sentinels stood guard. About the middle of the forenoon we heard loud shouting, and both,

hurrying to the window, saw the two sentinels on the church roof pointing excitedly off westward over the plain and heard them calling to the soldiers below: 'The Mexicans! The Mexicans are coming!' But few, even then, believed them, and only two horsemen were sent out to reconnoiter, while my Mexican friend and I returned to our visiting, and soon had forgotten what we took to be the needless alarm of the sentries.

"Possibly a couple of hours passed; and then, suddenly, we were again startled by loud cries and sounds of the wildest excitement, now coming from the streets outside. I caught my little girl up in my arms and rushed to the door. The street was the scene of the wildest confusion. Texan soldiers were racing up and down its length, shouting to their comrades, who had carelessly been allowed to scatter throughout the town: 'The Mexicans, the Mexicans are coming! To the Alamo! To the Alamo!' Officers on horseback dashed by, yelling the command to every soldier they saw: 'To the Alamo! Everybody to the Alamo!' Excited Mexican men and women and children were everywhere; and cries of 'Santa Anna, viva Santa Anna!' mingled with the commands of the officers and the shouts of the Texan soldiers. Off in the direction of Prospect Hill I could hear the firing of many guns.

"As I stood in the door, holding my baby tightly in my arms, the dread and the horror that only a

woman can know at such times trembling in my heart, praying for the coming of my husband, I heard a glad shout: 'Here she is, Lieutenant!' and Davy Crockett, his long rifle in his hand, a smile even then on his face, sprang to my side, followed almost instantly by my husband mounted on his horse. Davy caught the baby out of my arms, and my husband swung me upon the saddle in front of him. 'Just to sweeten my mouth for the bitter taste of them Greasers,' and Davy, snatching a kiss from my darling's lips, laughed and tossed her back into my arms, and we were off for the Alamo."

Mrs. Dickinson paused for a minute or two, while her clasped hands worked convulsively in her lap. Evidently she was thinking of the brave man whose strong arms would never again bear her and her child from danger and death to safety.

"When the Mexicans reached the town," she resumed, after the hands had again become still in the lap and the slight flush had faded from the white cheeks, "they sent a flag, demanding the immediate surrender of all the Texans. Colonel Travis answered the demand with a cannon shot; and hardly had the smoke of the cannon cleared away, when we saw, floating above the church tower of San Fernando, the Mexican's blood-red flag of no quarter, and knew that Santa Anna had decreed that the fight was to be to the death. The men cheered that dreadful flag, as if it were a joyful sight, and shouted back defiance to Santa Anna

and all Mexico; but I saw my husband's eyes turn anxiously to where I was standing, and a few minutes later he came and told me to go within the Compound and stay behind its thick walls, where there would be less danger from the shells and cannon balls of the Mexicans. A short time after this the Mexicans began shooting at us with their cannons; but they killed no one and did little damage.

“Colonel Bowie had married a Mexican woman, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Alsbury, a niece of the Mexican Vice-Governor Veramendi, and her little sister, came with him to the Alamo, and remained to nurse him after he came down with the fever, which soon forced him to keep to his bed. At first we women, we were all the women there were in the place, except an old Mexican serving woman, trembled at the sound of every cannon shot, and shuddered and held our ears whenever a shell burst; but, after the first few hours of the siege, we grew accustomed to the sounds and paid little attention to them, so long as we were behind the thick walls of the mission buildings.

“Of course we women did not see much of the actual fighting going on between the Mexicans surrounding the Alamo and our men behind its walls—we were not allowed to expose ourselves; but my husband, who passed all the time he could spare from his duties with me, kept us well informed. At first he laughed and joked a great deal about the

poor shooting of the Mexicans and how, when Fannin came with his four hundred men, they would drive Santa Anna and his army of convicts back across the Rio Grande. But, as day after day went by without a sign of the coming of Fannin, and the Mexican army grew in strength every day, until it must have numbered between three and four thousand men, and the food and the ammunition both became scarcer—matters that we had wit enough to find out for ourselves, for neither my husband nor any of the men ever hinted to us women the real hopelessness of our situation—my husband's laughter and jokes became less and less frequent, although he tried always to appear cheerful and hopeful, and I could see a mournful tenderness in his eyes whenever they rested upon me and baby, and knew without being told that the end was very near."

Again Mrs. Dickinson paused, and the lines about her mouth tightened, and the hands in her lap gripped each other until the cords showed white, and her whole form shook with pent-in emotions; but she never once lifted the gaze of her eyes from her lap, nor changed by the fraction of an inch the rigid uprightness of her body, and, when after a few moments she regained her self-control and continued her story, she spoke in the same monotonous undertone.

"Very early Sunday morning, the day the final assault was made," she went on, her voice not much

above a whisper but heard distinctly by everyone in the room, "my husband came to the cell-like room, where I and baby and Mrs. Alsbury and her sister slept. In the light of the torch he carried his face showed white and drawn, and I knew the moment his eyes looked into my eyes, so full of agony and tenderness were they, that the worst had come. Without a word he bent quickly and picked baby up from where she lay asleep, and held her close in his arms, and kissed her again and again, until she awoke; then, still not speaking, he slipped one arm around me and drew me tenderly to him.

"'What is it? What is it?' I whispered, clinging close to him and trembling so I could hardly stand. Before he uttered a word, I knew what his answer would be. I read it in the agony that looked from his eyes into mine, into mine and baby's.

"'The Mexicans are preparing to attack the Alamo on all sides at once in overwhelming numbers, dear,' he said. 'I have come to say good-by to you and baby, until—' he hesitated and the arm around me tightened, 'until after the fight. Listen! You can hear their calls to battle.'

"And then, as we stood silent in the stillness of the dimly lighted room and listened intently, I heard, coming through the peaceful morning air, the sounds of far-off bugles, the beatings of drums, the rattling of arms, and the shoutings of men.

“ ‘Here, take this, but use it only in the utmost extremity,’ and my husband, slipping his arm from around me, thrust his hand into the bosom of his blouse and drew out a long, keen-bladed Mexican dagger, and placed it in my hand. ‘The Mexican soldiers are devils. The knife before them, but only in the last extremity. Do not stir from this room. Keep the door fast locked. I will come again when I can, but now I must go, I must go,’ and he was gone, leaving me standing with baby crying in my arms, and Mrs. Alsbury and her little sister staring white-faced after him, and the far-off sounds of the gathering Mexican army in my ears.

“I quieted baby and laid her back sleeping in her little bed; and then I went and stood by the single small window of our cell-like room, with Mrs. Alsbury and her sister standing close by my side, and waited—waited with the Mexican dagger hidden in the bosom of my dress.

“The room where we stood was a small arched enclosure in the sacristy of the church, and its one narrow window looked out through thick stone into the walled yard of the convent. The yard-walls and the convent building prevented us from seeing the Mexican army advancing to the attack, but we could see the brave defenders, hurrying through the yard to the walls and the flat roof of the convent, and could hear the heavy tramping of their feet on the church roof over our heads. The sun had not yet risen, but the early light of dawn was

in the air, and I could see the men on the walls and roofs distinctly.

“Perhaps ten minutes passed after my husband left me, when I heard a loud blare of bugles, the sound beginning to the west and seemingly circling round the Alamo.”

“‘The charge! It is the charge! Holy Mother, protect us, it is the Mexicans sounding the charge!’ cried the little woman by my side, covering her face with her hands.”

“The blare of the bugles was almost instantly followed by a burst of music from the regimental bands. We could hear them clearly; and, at the first sound of their strains, the little Mexican woman shivered and crouched down on the floor, her little sister clinging tightly to her.

“‘Mary, tender Mary, pity us!’ she wailed. ‘It is the Deguello, the Cutthroat, they play! They will murder us all! Holy Mother of sorrows, guard us.’”

“I saw the Texans on the roof of the convent and on the walls, standing grimly side by side, their long rifles in their hands. I heard the dreadful music coming nearer and nearer, the commands of the officers growing louder and louder, and above the music and the commands the deepening roar of the hoarse cries of the advancing thousands, shouting: ‘Kill the foreigners! Kill the rebels! Kill, kill, kill!’ Then from the roof of the church a cannon roared; and I saw the men on the roof of

the convent kneel suddenly behind the parapet, their rifles to their shoulders; and then, from all around and from the roof above our heads, burst a deafening crash of sounds, and clouds of smoke rose above the walls of the convent, through which I saw the moving forms of the Texans and the red flames of cannons and rifles, and heard the fierce, terrible cries of fighting men. Demons, demons they sounded like!"

A shudder ran from head to foot through Mrs. Dickinson's body, and involuntarily she lifted her hands and clapped them over her ears, as if she still heard those dreadful sounds of battle, and her voice, which during the last few sentences had become louder and louder, rose almost into a yell as she uttered the last words.

"Lady, lady," and General Houston laid a strong hand soothingly on the agitated woman's head. "Lady, you are far from those dreadful scenes, surrounded by friends. Nothing can harm you here. Nothing can harm you here," and very gently he pressed her hands down from her ears. "Do not continue, if the story agitates you too much. We know, we all know without your telling, how bravely and nobly they died."

"Thank you, thank you. I will control myself. The story must be told. I owe it to my husband, to the brave men who fell with him, that Texas, the world, should know how they died," and once again she clasped her thin hands tightly together

in her lap, and stared steadfastly at them with her burning eyes.

“For many minutes that dreadful firing continued,” she began, again in the monotonous undertone, “and soon the smoke was so thick I could see the men, only when the swirling air lifted it, and showed them loading and shooting as fast as swift hands could ram powder and balls home and lift rifles to shoulders. Then, suddenly, I heard the Texans cheering wildly, and a minute later my husband came running through the smoke to the window where I stood, his face black with the grime of battle and his eyes shining.

“‘We have beat them back!’ he cried. ‘We have beat them back! I felt as if I must tell you. Hold the baby up where I can see her face. But they will come again. Now I must be going,’ and, with a hungry look into baby’s face and mine, he hurried back to his men.

“For a few minutes there was a lull in the firing, and the smoke of battle rose in the air and hung in a cloud above the Alamo. Powder-blackened men hurried by the window where I stood, carrying water and ammunition to their comrades on the roofs and walls, and, as they passed, they joked and laughed, like schoolboys on a frolic; and yet, there was not one among them who did not know what the end was to be. On the roof of the convent, behind a rampart of sand bags, I saw Davy Crockett. He was loading rifles; and, as soon as

he had loaded one, he would smile and nod his head and lean it up against the sand bags, within quick reach of his hand. Already there were six rifles standing in the row of loaded guns leaning against the sand bags. With the seventh gun in his hand, I saw him suddenly pause, drop the unloaded gun, catch up one of the loaded rifles, throw it to his shoulder and almost instantly fire; and, almost at the same moment, the crash of the dreadful sounds of the firing guns and the fierce yells of the men began again, more terrible than before, and the smoke of the powder rose thickly and hung in heavy clouds above the Alamo.

“Again and again I saw Davy Crockett throw a rifle to his shoulder and fire, until the six guns were emptied. I saw him reload again and again and fire; and then the thick smoke settled down between us and hid the convent from my sight.”

“So far I had not seen a Mexican; but now,” and a shudder ran through her frame, “the heads of dark-faced men began appearing above the walls of the convent yard, and I saw the clubbed rifles of the Texans knocking them back, knocking them back until their arms must have grown weary with the knocking, but still the row of heads along the top of the wall grew thicker and thicker each moment, and soon shoulders were appearing, and then, with a wild yell, two Mexicans leaped over the wall inside the yard. Before their feet touched the ground the knives of the Texans had killed them.

But now the top of the wall was swarming with Mexicans.—they were dropping to the ground like apples shaken from a tree, and soon the whole convent yard was a wild turmoil of fighting, dying men.

“The Texans fought like lions among an overwhelming, barking, biting pack of hounds. They uttered no sounds, but struck, struck, struck, with knives and clubbed rifles; and, when one went down, there was a circle of dead Mexicans around him. No quarter was asked, nor thought of. Each fought, until he fell dead fighting. Not a coward, not a shirker among them. From the convent roof, from the church roof, the rifles, even the cannon, of the Texans were turned on the Mexicans in the convent yard, until their dead covered the ground; but still they swarmed over the walls, and slowly, but surely, like a hundred dogs clinging to a lion, were worrying the Texans to death.

“A terrible, a horrible scene for a woman to look on; but I could not force my eyes away—not until the fighting came close up to the window, and a drop of Texan blood splashed on my face. Then I must have fell fainting to the floor; for the next thing I remember I was lying on the floor, with baby screaming in my ears and the wild-eyed Mexican woman praying over me.

“‘Grace of Mary! Holy Virgin, help! Mother of Sorrows, protect us! The men are fiends—devils! They can only kill! kill! kill!’—Never can I forget that wailing voice, nor the agony and fear

and horror in her white face and wild upturned eyes.'

"The door of the room we were in shook. The Mexican woman shrieked, caught up her sister, and fled to the farthest corner of the room, where she crouched, burying their heads in the folds of her mantilla. I seized my baby in my arms and began to pray—my eyes on the door.

"'It is I! It is I, your husband! Open, open quick!' and again the door shook under the heavy blows of a strong man; but it was a full minute before I recovered wit enough to recognize my husband's voice. Then I flew to the door.

"My God, what a sight! Blood, blood from head to foot! But still my husband, and alive! Baby shrunk from him; but he tore her from my arms, and seized me by the arm.

"Come, the powder magazine is near here, and we are going to fire it, before the last man falls. Come," and, holding baby in his arms, he pulled me from the room.

"The church was full of powder smoke, and, through the smoke and in the red flames of pistols and rifles, I saw men fighting behind us, in front of us, all around us; but, with a shout, 'Go ahead, Davy Crockett!' dear old Davy leaped before my husband, and with bowie-knife and rifle made a road of safety for us.

"Near the entrance to the church there is a small

vaulted room, and thither my husband hurried me. As I entered this room I heard the deep voice of Bowie, who lay on his bed in the baptistry opposite, calling down maledictions on Santa Anna and all Mexicans and cursing the sickness that kept him from the fight. At the door my husband caught me in his arms, kissed baby and me as he would the face of the dying, and thrust baby into my arms—'Don't forget the dagger,' and the heavy door had swung shut between us and he had gone, before I knew what he was doing. I never saw him alive again."

Mrs. Dickinson stopped abruptly, and sat for a minute without speaking, clasping and unclasping her hands in her lap, her lips tightening over her teeth, and her sunken eyes seeming to sink still further back into her head. No one in the room spoke, no one moved, and the tense whiteness of each face showed how deeply the tale had stirred her listeners.

"I do not remember what followed," she continued, when she again had her emotions under control. "I was in too great agony of soul to comprehend anything clearly. But, like one in a horrible dream, I heard the crash and roar of the fight outside, coming nearer—receding—coming yet nearer. Then it crashed against the door; and I gripped baby tightly to my breast with one arm, while the hand of the other clutched the haft of

the dagger in my bosom, and stood waiting, waiting, half stupefied by the dread and horror of it all, for the end.

“With a great splintering of wood the door burst open, and I saw the opening crowded with blood-covered, fiendish faces; and then, before my hand could draw the dagger, baby, in the wildest paroxysm of fright, threw her little arms around my neck, and clung there so tightly that I could not withdraw the hand that held the dagger until too late, and the Mexican soldiers had rushed forward and seized me. They tore baby violently from me, and pulled me, shrieking and struggling, from the room, out into the slaughter pen of the church. Like wolves tearing at a lamb, they snarled and fought for my poor body. A huge brute tore me from my captor. ‘Kill! Kill!’ he shouted, and joyfully I saw his dripping knife raised above my bosom. But, before he could strike, a sword blade struck the upraised wrist, half severing it, and, with a howl of pain and rage, the brute dropped the knife, and turned to look into the muzzle of a loaded pistol and back of the pistol the flaming eyes of a Mexican officer.”

“‘Dogs! Cowards!’ cried the officer, clearing a space around me with his sword. ‘Would you kill a woman and her baby? There are yet men for your weapons, if you have the courage to face them,’ and he pointed to the opposite side of the church, where a few Texans still stood fighting with knives

and clubbed rifles in front of Bowie's door. 'Quick! Back into the room, lady,' and the officer, lifting baby up into my arms, quickly pushed me through the door. 'Do not use the dagger, lady,' and he glanced at the weapon in my hand. 'Not a hair of your head shall be harmed. I, Colonel Almonte, swear it,' and, turning, he gave a sharp command to two soldiers, who, with crossed bayonets, stationed themselves in front of the door, with orders to kill any who attempted to enter.

"In a half stupor I sank to the floor, baby pressed tightly to my bosom, and, through the dismantled door, between the bodies of my guards, watched, with shuddering horror, the struggle at the opposite side of the church. I saw the Texans go down, one by one, until the last one had fallen. I saw the Mexicans rush over their bodies and burst in the door of the room where the sick Bowie lay. I heard Bowie's yell of defiance, and the crack—crack—crack of his pistols, and saw half a dozen Mexicans go down in the crowded doorway; and then the room was full of a confusing swirl of yelling, shooting fiends and blinding smoke. Presently the shouting Mexicans came out of the room, bearing aloft on the points of their bayonets the dead body of Jim Bowie."

"Now, of the hundred and eighty-five Texans that were living men when the fight began, only half a dozen remained alive, and these were still fighting, standing in an angle of the church near

the entrance, their backs to the wall, their faces to the snarling pack of Mexicans that were trying to pull them down, a rampart of dead Mexicans around them. From where I sat I could see this last heroic stand of the bravest men that ever lived; and, even in that moment of horror, my heart thrilled at the sight. How scornfully they defied the overwhelming numbers of the soldiers of Santa Anna! How fearlessly and skilfully they met the knives and bayonets and sword thrusts of the jackals around them!

“And foremost among this little band of heroes I saw the tall form of Davy Crockett. He was bleeding from a gash across the forehead, his clothing was torn and cut by a hundred bayonet-thrusts and knife-stabs; but still unconquered and undaunted he swung the deadly barrel of his rifle—all that was left of his loved Betsey—and struck with his long knife; and at every blow a Mexican went down. One by one his comrades fell, until he stood alone, the last of that heroic band.”

“For a dread moment the fighting ceased. The cowardly jackals paused in awe of the terrible prowess of the king lion. I heard Colonel Almonte shout, ‘Surrender!’ I heard Crockett answer, ‘Never!’ I heard another officer yell, ‘At him! At him!’ And then the fight began again—a hundred, all that could get within striking distance, against one man.

“I saw him strike down two men with the rifle

barrel. I saw another fall back with a knife thrust deep in his heart. Then I saw a bayonet pierce deep into his own brave breast, saw him sink down, still striking, with a hundred knives and bayonets stabbing at him. A minute later and I saw his dead body tossed aloft on the points of bayonets and borne outside the church."

Mrs. Dickinson, during the last part of her terrible recital, had almost lived the scenes she narrated. Her voice, her face, her actions had become vivid with passion and horror and despair. She had sprung to her feet and stood with dilating eyes staring straight ahead, but seeing nothing present, with thin hands clenching and unclenching themselves and clutching at her throat and heart, with voice trembling and shrilling, as she depicted those final scenes of a heroism as glorious and as noble as the world has ever known; and now, with the last Texan dead, she sank back, panting and breathless, into her chair.

"There is little more to tell," she said, as her burning eyes again fixed themselves on her hands tightly clasped together in her lap. "That afternoon Colonel Almonte, who I learned was the aide and favorite of Santa Anna himself, conducted me to his own quarters in the town, and in every way treated me as a gentleman would a lady in the utmost distress. The next day he brought me word from Santa Anna, that as soon as I was able, I was to transmit the President's proclamation and

messages to the Texans at Gonzales. I told him I was ready to go at once; but he would not let me start until the next morning, when I found that Colonel Travis's negro servant, who had not been discovered until after the slaughter was ended and had been spared, was to go with me, accompanied by another negro who was to act as our guide. Not until Colonel Travis's negro told me, did I know that all the dead bodies of the slaughtered Texans had been collected by the orders of that monster, Santa Anna, piled together with alternate layers of wood, and the mass then heaped with dry brush and set on fire. My poor husband! Oh, my poor husband, not even to have Christian burial! Burnt! Burnt! Burnt!" her voice rose into a wail.

"Lady, lady," there was infinite tenderness and sadness in Houston's voice. "Lady, do not let their burning trouble you. In Homeric days the dead demigods were laid on funeral pyres and their bodies burned. These men, these Texans, were demigods, and it was gloriously fitting that their bodies, too, should be burnt together in one great funeral pyre, on the very spot where they so nobly died. Lady, believe me, lady, Texas will not forget your suffering nor your heroic sacrifice, nor," and his voice and face hardened, "will she forget to exact in full measure a just accounting from that iniquitous monster of cruelty, Santa Anna, and his barbarous myrmidons. Now," and he arose and

bowed to Mrs. Dickinson with courtly dignity, "that you have nobly done your duty in recalling these terrible scenes, it remains for us to do ours in avenging them. Allow me to conduct you to your room, where you can get the rest you so greatly need," and he gave Mrs. Dickinson his arm.

Mrs. Dickinson, now that her sad story was ended, had relapsed into the terrible apathy that sometimes comes when the agony of soul seems to have burnt dry all the fountains of feeling. Her eyes looked as if they could never shed another tear-drop. Like a human automaton she arose and took Houston's arm and walked with him toward the lounge where lay her little girl. As Houston bent over the child to lift her in his arms, she awoke and stared up into his face in wondering surprise for a minute, then she turned, and, stretching out her arms to her mother, cried: "I want my papa! I want my papa! I want my papa!"

For a moment Mrs. Dickinson stood staring at her child, then the tears gushed to her eyes, and at the same instant all the sealed fountains of her feelings broke loose, and, sobbing wildly, she caught the baby up into her arms; and with her whole form quivering with the outward gush of her emotions and the tears streaming over her baby's face, General Houston, half supporting her, led her from the room.

Nature had given her sore-stricken heart the best possible medicine.

CHAPTER XXII

CHASED BY MEXICAN CAVALRY

WHEN General Houston returned to his room a few minutes later, his lips were set and his eyes aflame.

“We must abandon Gonzales at once, this very night,” he said, “unless we wish to have repeated the disaster of the Alamo. Santa Anna and his cutthroat army may reach here any moment, certainly within the next few hours. We must fall back before him, until we have gathered sufficient strength to meet him with an almost certainty of victory. Texas cannot afford another Alamo. Fannin must also fall back. We must unite our forces. Boys,” and he turned to Trav and Tom, “be ready to start for Goliad in an hour. I dare not have you wait until morning. A few hours of delay might be fatal to Fannin. I will give the necessary orders for horses and food at once and write my dispatches. Come back ready for the journey in an hour. Now, go. Every moment of my time is now precious to Texas,” and he turned to his officers and began rapidly giving them orders.

Trav and Tom hastened from the room to where they had left their guns and other equipments, and

at once set about making themselves ready for the start to Goliad. Both lads had been greatly stirred by Mrs. Dickinson's story of the fall of the Alamo and the heroic death of Davy Crockett, and had sat as if in a trance while she was telling it. And now, not even the dangers of the journey before them, nor the thought of Kitty in the hands of Vasquez, nor the deep anxiety caused by the illness of Mrs. McNelly, could keep their minds from picturing and re-picturing those heroic scenes, when that little handful of heroes virtually gave their lives in a glorious attempt to hold back the brutal hordes of Santa Anna's army long enough to give the unprotected settlers along the frontier a chance to escape and Texas time to arouse herself.

"I—I—" Trav was trying to give voice to his feelings. "I don't see how any man in Texas can knuckle down to Santa Anna, after knowing how Travis and his men died in the Alamo. It was glorious, glorious! And just the telling of it made me feel as if there wasn't anything in all the world quite as grand and noble as to die, as they did, for one's country. I don't see how any man in Texas would dare to be a coward now, with the example of the Alamo before him."

"It was grand and awful," Tom agreed. "And it made me, too, feel as if the greatest thing in the world was willingly to give up one's life for the good of one's country. I don't think I ever understood what real patriotism was before; but I

know now. Brave, brave Davy Crockett—I—I—” His voice choked.

Neither lad could think of Davy Crockett and his heroic end, without a lump coming into his throat; and, for a few minutes, both boys were silent, each thinking how sad and terrible it was that never again would he see that genial face alight with its whimsical smile nor never again hear that rollicking voice in merry tale or loud laughter—But, there is no need of telling you boys how Trav and Tom felt over the death of brave Davy Crockett, their hero. You know, your own hearts have already told you better than many words could do the telling.

At the end of the hour Trav and Tom stood in front of General Houston's quarters, ready for their long and perilous ride to Fannin at Goliad. It was now nearing eleven o'clock of a cloudless, moonless night; but there was no sleep nor quietness in Gonzales. Everywhere were confusion and commotion. Men and women and children were hurrying in and out of the houses, wagons were being loaded with the women and children and a few household necessities, the soldiers, some three hundred, were drawn up ready to escort the fleeing people, hurriedly abandoning their homes, everything, before the dreaded advance of Santa Anna and his men. It was a scene that brought the horrors of war home to Trav and Tom in a way they had not thought of before, and showed them that war was

not all glorious fighting and heroic dying, but that the old and the feeble, the women and the children had to bear the brunt of its sufferings without any of its compensating honors and glories.

"My heart goes with you, my brave lads," General Houston said, as he handed Trav and Tom his message to Fannin. "And, if ever again you get sight of that villainous Mexican, Vasquez, shoot the infernal coward on the spot, shoot him for the good of humanity. Now, remember, that you may have the lives of Fannin and his men in your keeping, and spare neither your own bodies nor the bodies of your horses in getting to them as quickly as possible. May the God of your country protect you! Good-by," and, gripping each boy hard by the hand, he turned away.

Trav and Tom sprang into their saddles, Jed Watkins, the guide who was to go with them, was already mounted and waiting, and the three rode swiftly out of Gonzales, and headed their horses toward Goliad, some hundred and thirty miles to the south. An hour later they reached a hill, and looked backward through the darkness toward Gonzales, and saw the skies lighted by the flames of a great fire.

"They've burnt th' town down to keep it from sheltering Santa Anna and his butchers," declared Jed Watkins, the guide, as his eyes rested on the distant flames; "an' I reckon they've done jest about th' proper thing. I'd rather have a skunk

a-stoppin' in a house of mine than one of Santa's butchers."

"And they've set fire to the whole town, to their own homes, the only homes they have in the world! I did not know before that war meant such terrible things!" and Trav's face showed how deeply the scenes of the last few hours had moved him.

"War's somethin' more than marchin' men, young feller, an' flyin' flags, an' playin' bands, an' firin' guns. It's terrible on th' women folks an' children; an' thar ain't no glory in it for them, only tears an' sufferin', an' like as not a horrible death by starvation or somethin' worse. But, we've no time to spend philosophizin' on th' evils of war, like a parson. It's get tew Goliad for us. Come on," and, striking his spurs into his horse, he galloped down the hill and on toward Goliad, followed by the boys.

The news of the fall of the Alamo had gone before them, and every settler's house they passed that day was empty; but they met many of the fugitives, all hurrying eastward, the dread of Santa Anna in every heart. They had abandoned their homes, everything, and many of them were in a pitiful condition. But our three horsemen dared not pause to render them help, no matter how much they should have liked to have done so; for they were on a mission to save hundreds from a worse fate, and the nearer Trav and Tom came to Goliad the more anxious they became concerning the capture

of Kitty and the sickness of Mrs. McNelly. A week had now passed since they had heard a word from Goliad, and in those terrible times many horrible things might happen in a week.

At sundown they camped, men and horses utterly worn-out; but, before sunrise the next morning, they were in their saddles again and riding southward. Fortunately they met no Mexicans. Santa Anna and his army had been delayed too long by the terrible fight at the Alamo to have yet reached the section of the country through which they were riding; but, had they been a day later, they never would have reached Goliad alive. However, fortune was kind to them, and late in the afternoon of the third day after leaving Gonzales, Jed Watkins pointed to a small hill half a mile ahead.

"If I'm kerrek, an' I reckon I be, we can see Goliad from atop that hill," he said; "an' 'twon't be more'n five minutes afore we know whether or not th' Mexies have got Fannin, somethin' I'm mighty anxious tew find out afore we go much farther," and, striking his tired horse with his quirt, he hurried toward the hilltop, his keen eyes searching every suspicious tree or bush or clump of grass as a possible lurking place for an enemy.

Trav's and Tom's hearts began to thump violently within their breasts. What would the hilltop reveal to them? Would they see Goliad laid waste and in the possession of the enemy, or still in the hands of the Texans? Would they find their

fathers and Mrs. McNelly and Kitty safe, or—at the thought of the horrible alternative they both dug their spurs into their horses' flanks and galloped after Jed Watkins.

But, when the foot of the hill was reached, Jed Watkins was far too wary and experienced to allow a heedless rush to its top, and, dismounting, he gave the reins of his horse to Tom to hold, and, bidding the boys wait where they were until he gave the signal that all was safe, began creeping cautiously toward a little clump of bushes on the summit, which would furnish him with an effectual screen while overlooking the valley beyond.

Trav and Tom watched him with feverish anxiety. They saw him reach the bushes, saw him carefully part them and peer long and cautiously over the prairie beyond. Then they saw him stand up, still screened by the bushes, and, shading his eyes with his hand, search all the surrounding country with his keen glances. Suddenly they saw him drop quickly to his hands and knees, and begin crawling rapidly toward them, until the hilltop hid him from all beyond. Then he jumped to his feet and ran swiftly to where they stood, and sprang into his saddle.

“Mexican cavalry!” he panted. “Not over half a mile tew th’ left. Saw ’em comin’ up out of a gully through th’ hill. We must try an’ give ’em th’ slip by ridin’ tew th’ right, until we gets tew another gully that I knows of ’bout a mile from

here. Then we'll make a dash from thar for Goliad. Fannin's still holdin' th' place; an' maybe we can get thar afore th' Mexies can get us. Come on," and, wheeling his horse, he galloped off rapidly to the right, keeping close to the foot of the hill, and casting many anxious glances behind him.

Trav and Tom, with a whitening of their faces and a tightening of their grips on their rifles, galloped after him.

They reached the gully in safety. Evidently the Mexican cavalry had no knowledge of their presence. Here, securely hidden, Jed Watkins halted.

"We must give our hosses a bit of rest," he said, dismounting. "I'll jest scoot on ahead tew th' openin' of th' gully tew see if th' coast is clear for a dash. Hold my hoss, an' keep your ears open an' your eyes peeled. I'll be back in a jiffy," and, tossing his bridle rein to one of the boys, he hurried up the gully.

Trav and Tom did not find it a pleasant task to wait inactive. They longed for action, to do something that would get them into Goliad as quickly as possible. Now that they were so near, every moment of delay became almost unbearable. They imagined all sorts of terrible things that might have happened to Kitty and Mrs. McNelly. Even the danger from the Mexican cavalry was almost forgotten in their anxiety to get into Goliad. Consequently they awaited the return of Jed Watkins most impatiently.

The gully ran straight ahead for perhaps a dozen rods, then turned, and the boys' eyes could follow it only to the turn. They watched Jed until he disappeared beyond this turn, and then they watched the turn, until, after an interval of some ten minutes, he reappeared, running excitedly toward them.

"Mount! Mount!" he called, the moment he came in sight of them. (The boys had dismounted to give their horses all the rest possible.) "Mount, and ride tew meet me! It's now, or never! Th' Mexies are ridin' straight for this gully, but they're still half a mile away, an' it's not more'n a couple of miles tew Goliad. I reckon we can make it, if our hosses' legs don't gin out."

Trav and Tom at his first cry of "mount" had sprung into their saddles, and while he had been speaking they had been galloping toward him, leading his horse. The moment they met, Jed, without stopping the horse, jumped on his back.

"Get your guns in workin' trim," he cried, as he galloped up alongside of Trav and Tom. "We might have tew dew some shootin', jest tew sort of warn them vermint we ain't wantin' none of their company."

Beyond the turn already mentioned, the gully ran some twenty rods, and then opened abruptly on the prairie beyond, having cut a ragged gash through the hills. In two minutes the three horsemen had arrived at this opening, and, in another

minute, were galloping at full speed across the level prairie toward the hills of Goliad.

Trav and Tom, as they dashed out on the prairie, glanced swiftly to the left. The Mexicans were there, a couple of dozen or more of them, riding slowly, close to the foot of the hills. For a few minutes they did not appear to see the galloping horsemen. Then the boys saw them suddenly stop, stare in their direction for an instant, and then, with a shout, dig their spurs into their horses' sides and gallop furiously after them. The race for life was on.

At the start the Mexicans were a good half a mile behind; but they were well-mounted, on comparatively fresh horses, and the horses of the boys and their guide had been ridden hard all day, and were absolutely incapable of any great or prolonged burst of speed. Consequently the horses of our friends held their own in the mad race for only a few minutes, then both their wind and their legs began to fail, and an anxious backward glance showed Jed Watkins that they were being overhauled rapidly by the Mexican cavalry.

"Turn in your saddles an' gin 'em a shot," he called to Trav and Tom. "They're gainin' on us like a house afire, an' maybe th' noise of your guns'll call th' 'tention of some of Fannin's men tew us," and he glanced anxiously toward the distant hill, behind whose fortified walls were Fannin and safety.

Trav and Tom, dropping the reins of their bridles and throwing their rifles to their shoulders, turned in their saddles when the pursuing Mexicans were in range, and fired. To their astonishment, for neither lad had the slightest idea of being able to make a hit, the foremost of their pursuers threw up his hands and tumbled from his horse.

“Hurra!” yelled Jed joyously. “I reckon that’ll take some of th’ ginger out of their hosses’ legs. Jimmina, but that was a mighty purty shot! Bet you can’t do it agin! Hi, look thar!” and he pointed excitedly toward Goliad.

As he spoke the boys saw the gates of the fort on the hill thrown wide open, and a small body of horsemen dash through them, and, with loud cheers, gallop swiftly down the hill.

The fall of their comrade did not delay the Mexicans an instant; but, with loud cries of vengeance, they rode more furiously than ever, gaining so rapidly on the failing horses of the Texans, that, to the anxious eyes of Jed Watkins, it seemed as if they must be overtaken before their rescuers from the fort could come within shooting distance.

“Faster! Faster!” he cried to the boys, “or them skunks’ll get us yit,” and with voice and whip and spur he urged his poor horse to do his utmost.

But their laboring horses, having already done their best, were losing instead of gaining speed, and the Mexicans were drawing near more rapidly with every passing moment. Now they began to shoot,



Suddenly, Tom's horse stumbled, throwing the boy over his head.

T.

and the boys heard the bullets singing spitefully by their ears. Then, suddenly, without warning, Tom's horse stumbled and fell headlong, throwing the boy over his head to the ground.

Trav saw him fall, heard the shout of triumph from the Mexicans, now not fifty rods behind; and, without an instant's hesitation, wheeled his horse and rushed to Tom's rescue.

"Th' gol-darned idjit! Now they'll get th' hull on us," and, with a jerk, Jed Watkins yanked his horse about and threw his rifle to his shoulder. For an instant he sat, like a bronze statue on his panting horse, then his long rifle flamed, and a moment later the foremost horse of the pursuers was racing riderless over the prairie. Again the long rifle flamed—it had two barrels, and again a Mexican horse was riderless. At the same moment a cannon boomed from the fort, and the oncoming Texans, though still at long range, fired.

This was more than Mexican courage could stand, and, by the time Trav had Tom, who had jumped unhurt to his feet, on his horse behind him, the Mexicans had whirled their horses about, and were racing back even faster than they had come.

A few minutes later the little body of Texan horsemen swept by the boys, cheering wildly, and continued on after the fleeing Mexicans.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PRICE OF OBSTINACY.

THE first person to meet Trav and Tom outside of the walls of the fort was Mrs. McNelly. She came running through the open gate, as they walked up the hill leading their weary horses behind them, and threw herself, sobbing, into Trav's strong young arms.

"Kitty? Father? What has happened? Mother, tell me," and Trav looked with trembling apprehension into the thin white face of his mother, where suffering and anguish of heart had so plainly left their marks.

"My boy, my brave boy! Thank God, I still have you safe!" and Mrs. McNelly clung the tighter to Trav.

"But, mother, mother, tell me what has happened to father and Kitty! Tell me!" cried Trav, his heart wrung with anguish and fear.

"Vasquez has Kitty," Mrs. McNelly replied, controlling herself with difficulty sufficiently to answer Trav's appeal. "He stole her the day you left. The next day your father and Jonas and Long Bill, the hunter, started to find and rescue Kitty; and from that moment to this I have not

seen them nor heard a word from them, only this," and she thrust her hand in the bosom of her dress and drew out a crumpled piece of paper and handed it to Trav, while the look of anguish on her face deepened.

Trav seized the paper, smoothed it out with trembling fingers, and read:

"To wife of Big Sam McNelly, who crack Mexican skulls with bare fists.

"You no husband now—no girl now. He my slave. Whip, whip, whip, every day. She my slave. Make do all dirty work.

"Mexican arm of vengeance long. Reach round world, and strike, strike, strike. VASQUEZ."

"Mother, how did you get this? When did you get this?" Trav cried, his face as white as chalk, as he handed the paper to Tom, whose own face whitened as he read.

"This morning. Found it pinned to my pillow," and she shuddered. "How it got there, no one knows. I fear—I fear—oh God, give me back my husband and my girl!" and Mrs. McNelly, her stoicism all gone under this doubly terrible affliction, clung weeping to Trav's neck.

Trav comforted his mother as best he could, and, hastening with her inside the fort to Colonel Fannin, gave him General Houston's despatch.

Colonel Fannin read the despatch, his face flushing as he read General Houston's peremptory orders to immediately retreat to Victoria, intrench himself, and there await further orders.

"Impossible! Impossible!" he declared impatiently. "I cannot evacuate this place immediately. Houston does not know my situation. I sent Captain King with twenty-eight men to bring in the families at Refugio. He has been attacked there by the Mexican cavalry, and I have sent Colonel Ward with one hundred and twenty men to his rescue. I must wait their return. But I will send a courier at once to Refugio to bid them hasten," and he hurried away to give the order.

That night Trav and Tom, wearied as they were, sat long with Mrs. McNelly, listening to the unhappy woman's tale of the misfortunes that had come to her since the morning when they had started on their ride for Texas to Washington, and, in turn, telling her of their own adventures and repeating the sad and terrible story of the fall of the Alamo and the heroic deaths of brave Davy Crockett and his comrades, as they had heard it from the lips of the still more unfortunate Mrs. Dickinson. Mrs. McNelly wept for the deaths of those brave men, for the sorrows of the dear woman who had been so kind to her and her husband; and her tears for others were like salve to her own heart-wounds.

Poor woman, the loss of Kitty, coming on top

of the hardships she had so recently endured, had been almost more than her fortitude, great as it was, could bear, and for a number of days she had been very ill. Now, she was slowly mending, but still was far from being her sturdy, self-reliant self either in body or in mind.

Trav and Tom, although in their own hearts they feared the truthfulness of his cruel message, both scoffed at the words of Vasquez, declaring that they did not believe he had captured Sam McNelly, but had sent the message to Mrs. McNelly just from pure Mexican devilment. Mrs. McNelly, comforted by this thought and the presence of her son, went to bed that night in an easier frame of mind and to sounder sleep than she had had for a week.

For three days longer Colonel Fannin waited for the return of Colonel Ward and Captain King and their men, sending out courier after courier in a vain effort to learn what had happened to them. Then came definite news that Ward and King had been defeated and were retreating in the direction of Victoria. On the same day Captain Horton, who had been out scouting, reported that a large force of Mexicans under General Urrea was slowly advancing from the direction of San Antonio, and that some of his men had been attacked by advance parties of the Mexican cavalry. Then at last Colonel Fannin awoke to the danger of his situation, and summoned his officers.

"I have determined to abandon my position at break of day to-morrow," he said to the officers. "We must destroy everything which would be helpful to the enemy that we cannot take with us."

Accordingly the fort was dismantled, the heavier pieces of cannon were buried, all the provisions and supplies, which could not be taken with them, burnt, and by sunrise the next morning everything was ready for the abandonment of Fort Defiance, the name Colonel Fannin had given the fortifications.

During these three days Trav and Tom had been in a constant fever of anxiety, not only on account of Kitty and their fathers, but, also, because of Fannin's failure to obey General Houston's peremptory orders to immediately abandon Goliad. They could understand the absolute uselessness of their attempting to go to the help of Kitty and their fathers, knowing well that long before now Vasquez had fled with his captives to the safety of the Mexican army, whither it would be suicide to follow him, and, galling as was this helplessness, they bowed to necessity. But, with the horror of the Alamo fresh before his eyes, and a Mexican army, known to be many times as large as his own, marching down upon him, and the way of retreat open before him, they could not understand the delay of Fannin. And there were many others, officers as well as privates, besides the boys in that little army, who could not understand this same fatal delay. Consequently, when at last the orders

to actually begin the retreat did come, there was great rejoicing and a sigh of relief went up from nearly every heart.

The morning was thick and sticky with a heavy fog, that clung like a great cloak about the shoulders of the world and delayed the start, but at last the order was given and the little army began moving toward the ford of the San Antonio River. First Captain Horton, in command of twenty-eight men, crossed the river, with orders to ride ahead and keep a sharp lookout for the enemy. Then followed the infantry, numbering in all some three hundred and fifty men. Through the gray mist the men moved like phantoms down to the river. Here the steep miry banks, down and up which it was almost impossible for the oxen to drag the cannon, delayed them.

Some of the officers, knowing how valuable every moment of time was now that they were beyond the protecting walls of the fort, begged Fannin to sink the cannon in the river and abandon them.

"No," and the obstinate lines on Colonel Fannin's face tightened as he spoke, "I will not abandon my cannon. They must go with me. I expect to have to fight, and I cannot do without them."

Brave but obstinate man! With those words you sealed your own fate and the fate of the brave men with you!

The cannon were not abandoned, and it was ten o'clock before the train of wagons and cannons were

finally safe on the opposite side of the river, and the march resumed across the open prairie, skirted with belts of timber, toward the Coletto Creek, some ten miles distant.

Trav and Tom, mounted on their horses, rode one on each side of the wagon in which sat Mrs. McNelly. The faces of both lads showed the effects of the anxiety and dread under which they had been laboring for the past few days; and now, as they rode along through the gray fog which was beginning to melt under the hot rays of the sun, there was an added look of dread and apprehension in the eyes with which they were continually searching the surrounding horizon, as if they were fearful of some great danger, but knew not from what quarter it might come. And, indeed, they were fearful; for to Trav and Tom it did not seem possible that the Mexicans would let slip this opportunity to attack Fannin, while moving across the open prairie, unprotected by fortifications and hampered by women and children fugitives and his precious train of cannons, if they were as near as reported, and in such overwhelming numbers.

Nor were Trav's and Tom's eyes the only eyes that were continually searching the horizon with apprehensive anxiety. All knew and all feared the danger of an attack by the Mexicans—all apparently but Fannin; and there was a feeling of depression, of dread, in every heart. The women spoke to

one another in low voices, the men marched in watchful silence, and even the little children were unusually quiet. The oxen groaned under the strain of dragging the heavy wagons and cannons over the unbeaten roads, and the wagons themselves creaked dismally and warningly, or so the sounds made by their straining wheels and axles seemed to the apprehensive ears of Trav and Tom, who, strive as they might, could not dismiss their fears.

For some three or four hours the train moved slowly forward, the fog lifting as the moments passed until the sun shone brightly through a clear sky; then, when within a couple of miles of the protecting timber that grew along the banks of the Coletto Creek, Fannin was compelled to call a halt or to abandon his cannon, for the tired oxen could drag them no farther without a rest.

Again his officers implored him anxiously to bury his cannon and leave them, pointing out that two Mexican videttes had been seen to watch them for a few minutes from a distance and then to gallop rapidly away, doubtless to carry the news of his retreat to the Mexican general, and warning him that they might expect the whole Mexican army down upon them if they delayed.

“No,” and Fannin’s thin lips closed tightly and his eyes lighted angrily, “I will not abandon the cannon. If we are threatened by the Mexican

army, all the more need that we should hold on to them. I will rest the oxen and let them crop the grass here for an hour."

"But," remonstrated one of his officers, "let us at least go on until we reach the Coieto. There we will have the protection of the trees and water; but here we are on the open prairie, even in a slight depression, where it would be most difficult to defend ourselves, if attacked."

"Saints of heaven!" and Colonel Fannin's face flushed angrily. "If you are in such deadly fear of the Mexicans, ride on and join Captain Horton and his scouts; but I and my cannon stay here until the oxen have rested and eaten of the rich grass that grows so plentifully in this same depression," and he turned imperatively from his officers and ordered the oxen unyoked and turned loose to graze.

Fatal words! They placed the final seal of doom upon many a brave man! If—but, why speak of ifs? It is of the past, where there are no ifs, that we write.

For nearly two hours the oxen were allowed to rest and feed, then at last Fannin gave the order to yoke up and resume the march.

"Well, I should think it was time," Tom complained indignantly, as he saw the men beginning to hitch the oxen to the wagons and the cannon. "Here it is nearly two o'clock in the afternoon and we've gone only about eight miles. 'Twon't take

very fast traveling for the Mexicans to catch us at this rate of speed. I can't see what Fannin—"

"Look! Look, there!" and Trav, who had been standing up in the wagon by his mother's side, pointed excitedly off to the right, where a dark line of horsemen was seen coming out of a belt of timber that skirted the prairie some two miles away. "It's the Mexicans! The Mexican cavalry! The Mexicans are coming!" he shouted, jumping from the wagon and springing onto the back of his horse.

Instantly the little army of Fannin was thrown into the greatest excitement, but there was little confusion. The women clung to their children and watched with blanching faces the advancing Mexicans. The men tightened their grips on their rifles and saw that the priming was fresh, while their faces hardened and their lips grew tighter across their clenched teeth.

"To the hills! To the hills! Hurry!" shouted Fannin, who now, when too late, saw the fatal error of his halting in a depression.

With shouts and yells and goads and whips the men urged the straining oxen toward the nearest hill. If they could only reach it—but, no. Before they had gone twenty rods one of the ammunition wagons broke down and they were compelled to halt. Fannin had been caught in a trap of his own setting.

The Mexican cavalry advanced rapidly on a gallop and formed in a mass between the Texans and

the trees and the water of the Coletto. Behind the cavalry came a large body of infantry, that promptly took a position in the rear of Fannin and began rapidly advancing lines on both sides of the Texans.

The trap was about to be sprung.

Fannin, the moment he saw that the battle must be fought then and there, formed his men into a hollow square, three ranks deep, with the wagons and the oxen in the center, and the cannons stationed at the corners, and, ordering his men to lie down and to reserve their fire until the enemy were within certain range, awaited the attack with a calmness and bravery that did much to redeem his lack of judgment and obstinacy.

Trav and Tom had watched all these proceedings with the most intense interest, an interest so great that for the moment they had no thought for the horror of wounds and death so soon to follow. Remember, boys, that this was their first battle; and the sight of the long lines of Mexican cavalry galloping to their places, flags fluttering, bugles blowing, equipments gleaming, and the regular files of infantry marching swiftly across the level prairie and forming in their rear, was, indeed, a gallant scene, and, so far, nothing had occurred to mar its beauty. But they were quickly recalled to the terrible realities of their situation by the wrathful voice of Jed Watkins, who had mounted a wagon near where the boys sat on their horses, in order to get a better view of his surroundings.

"Plumb surrounded," he broke out angrily, when his eyes had completed the circle of the horizon. "An' in a hole without water or nothin' tew keep them yeller skunks from jest swarmin' right over us, like a herd of stampedin' cattle. Of all fool things, tew stop right in a holler— Hi, here they come! Jimmina, I must get a hustle, if I wants tew be 'mong th' fust tew have a crack at 'em!" and, jumping down from the wagon, he ran at top speed to where the lines of men lay flat on the ground, the anger gone from his honest face and replaced by a look that indicated plainly his determination to make the best possible account of himself.

Trav and Tom, at Jed's shout, "Here they come!" gave one glance toward the Mexican cavalry, saw that they were galloping straight toward them, jumped from their horses, and, stopping only long enough for Trav to kiss the white face of his mother, raced after Jed Watkins and threw themselves down on the ground, one on either side of him, with rifles held ready for instant use.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire!" shouted Fannin. "Wait until you can make every shot tell! Wait until they get within short range!" and, utterly regardless of the Mexican balls that were now singing through the air above his head, he walked back and forth just behind his lines of reclining men.

On and on came the Mexicans, firing their guns

as they came. Now they did not look to the excited eyes of the boys to be over twenty rods away, still Fannin was shouting: "Steady, steady, boys! Hold your fire! Hold your fire!"

"Oh, why don't he tell us to shoot?" Trav exclaimed, his hands trembling so that he could hardly hold his rifle. "I—I'm sure they're near enough now."

"Jest hold your hosses, sonny," and Jed Watkins paused to bite off a fresh "chaw" of tobacco. "Jest hold your hosses an' keep a stedy hand an' eye. 'Tain't th' noise that counts in a fight like this: it's th' bullets that hits."

By this time the Mexican cavalry had come within short range. To the excited boys they looked as if they were about to ride over them, so near did the onrushing horsemen appear to their throbbing eyes. Suddenly Fannin waved his sword around his head.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Give it to them, boys! Give it to them!"

Instantly the first line of men rose to their knees, fired, and then fell flat on the ground, as the second line rose, fired, and in turn dropped to the ground, while the third line fired over their heads. By this time the first line was again ready; and thus the volleys, one after another, were repeated, as swiftly as the men could aim and fire, while the cannons, loaded with grape, joined gloriously in the chorus.

Every one of those hardy men were expert shots.

A rifle had been in their hands ever since they were old enough to lift one to their shoulders. At the first volley many a horse plunged riderless over the prairie—at the second, still more riderless horses—at the third, the horsemen wavered—at the fourth they broke, when not more than ten rods from those deadly lines of belching flames and bullets, and galloping madly back, away from the fatal hail of Texan rifle balls, leaving the prairie dotted with black forms that writhed or lay ominously motionless, and wildly galloping, riderless horses.

The Texans, Trav and Tom the most enthusiastic among them, jumped to their feet, and sent cheer after cheer after the fleeing cavalry; and then, with sobered faces, friends turned to friends to see if all were well with them.

Not a man had been killed by the wild firing of the Mexicans, and only a few wounded.

But the battle had not yet been won.

General Urrea, after this first taste of Texan shooting, waited until his infantry and cavalry had completely surrounded the little square of Texans, then he ordered a general charge from all sides at once; and the long lines of infantry and cavalry began moving toward the Texans, coming slowly until they were within range, and then, with a great shouting, charging at full speed, shooting as they charged, the infantry with bayonets fixed ready for the thrust.

“Steady, steady, men!” cautioned Fannin, still,

even in that hail of bullets, standing erect. "Aim low! Make every shot count! Steady, men!"

Fortunately the Texans had an abundance of weapons. By the side of each man lay two or three loaded rifles; and, as the Mexicans came on, they fired these with deadly rapidity. The cannons at each of the four corners roared and flamed and hurled their missiles with fearful slaughter into the crowded ranks of the enemy.

Down tumbled the horses and riders, and down tumbled the infantry in files, as if Death stood swinging a great scythe in their midst; but still on they came, until almost within bayonet-thrust of the flaming Texan guns. Then, suddenly, with wild yells of terror, the ranks broke and fled from that deadly square of Texans.

Again the Texans jumped to their feet, and shouted and cheered, and then turned anxious faces to their comrades at their sides.

Now Trav and Tom saw the horrors of war. A man not six feet from where they stood had been killed, and many a poor fellow lay groaning on the ground, while they were circled with dead and dying Mexicans, some of them almost within hand-reach of the outer line. Colonel Fannin still stood erect, but his face was white and drawn with pain. A Mexican ball had struck him in the thigh, making a painful wound.

But still the battle had not yet been won.

General Urrea now ordered the infantry to follow the Texan tactics, and to lie down within range and fire from that position; but, every time a Mexican head was raised to fire a gun, a Texan rifleman put a bullet through it, and the infantry, not having any particular liking for that sort of a game, soon fell back out of range of those deadly rifles.

General Urrea now tried to break the Texan lines by a cavalry charge gallantly led by himself; but the Mexican cavalry, brave and tried troops though they were, could not withstand the terrible hail of grape-shot and bullets that met them from the cannons and rifles of the Texans, and again broke and fled, while more horses dashed riderless over the plain and more dark spots sullied the virgin green of the prairie.

General Urrea was in a great rage. To have the finest troops in the Mexican army again and again repulsed by this little handful of Texans, was unendurable. For the honor of Mexico, the disgrace must be retrieved. He summoned his officers. He stormed and swore Mexican oaths at them; and then again ordered a general assault, furiously bidding his officers see that their men this time swept those Texans off the face of the earth.

Again the Mexican bugles sounded the charge; and again the Mexican cavalry and infantry rushed headlong from all sides down upon that square of flaming rifles and thundering cannons and dauntless

men, the officers stimulating the courage of their men by pricking them on from behind with the points of their swords.

The Texans fired until they had emptied all their rifles, and reloaded and fired again. The cannons hurled their grape and canister until their barrels were burning hot and choked with burnt powder.

"We cannot fire longer!" shouted one of the artillerymen to Fannin. "The cannon are too hot and clogged, and there is no water to swab them out!"

"Then take your rifles and give it to them!" yelled back Fannin.

The Mexicans dropped, like nuts from a shaken tree, off their horses. The infantrymen fell in squads; and the riderless horses of the cavalry, crazed with fear and wounds, plunged wildly through their ranks, knocking men down and throwing all into still greater confusion and terror. But the sharp points of the officers' swords still drove them on.

The cavalry were the first to break. The infantry, driven by the sharp swords from behind, charged on, until the powder from the Texan guns burnt the faces of the foremost ranks. Then officers and officers' swords were forgotten, everything but the death-laden flames flashing into their faces; and the infantry, as well as the cavalry, broke—turned—and fled, like a herd of stampeding buffaloes, headlong over the plain, away from those terrible Texans.

Once again the Texans jumped to their feet and cheered. But, when they turned from the fleeing enemy and glanced apprehensively up and down their own ranks, the light of victory went out of their eyes and their faces showed white and anxious through the smoke and grime of battle. There were over sixty dead and wounded now, and nearly all the wounded were seriously hurt.

During the wild turmoil of this fight Trav and Tom had loaded and fired their rifles with all the furious ardor of desperately fighting men, without a thought of the pain and suffering their bullets and the bullets of the enemy might cause; but now, with the results of those few moments of terrible fighting before their eyes, their hearts grew sick with the horror of it all.

"Oh, I never dreamed that a battle was as dreadful as this!" Trav cried, as the two boys leaned white and faint against a wagon near which Mrs. McNelly was helping the surgeons care for the wounded. "It is terrible! horrible!" and he shuddered and closed his eyes to shut out the fearful sight of the dead and wounded men.

"That's whar your plumb right, sonny," and Jed Watkins seated himself on the wagon tongue and began carefully cleaning and loading the three rifles, which constituted his armament. "Fighting is a terrible, horrible business— Jest hear them wounded Mexies screamin' out thar on th' plain, with no one tew ease their hurts or even tew give

'em a glass of water—but 'tain't as terrible an' horrible, as it is tew knuckle down tew a tyrant, like Santa Anna; an', when it comes tew knucklin' or fightin', I reckon any man what is a man'll choose th' fightin'. Jimmina, but we jest did give them Mexies particular fits, didn't we?" and Jed's eyes roamed exultantly over the plain, where the Mexicans, men and horses, were still running—all of them that had life enough in them to run.

"But, have we licked them? Won't they attack us again?" and Tom turned an anxious face to Jed.

"Lick 'em! You bet we licked 'em!" and Jed's face shone with triumph. "Jest look at 'em still scootin' tew git out of range of our bullets. But," and his face darkened, "you'd better git tew cleanin' your rifles, for I reckon we'll have tew lick 'em some more afore th' fight is over."

Jed Watkins was right. General Urrea had no idea of allowing his prey, virtually already in his talons, to escape. But he had had enough, and his men had more than enough, of close fighting for the present. He would surround the little square of Texans and wait, like a great pack of wolves around a surrounded buffalo bull. In the morning the Texans would be stiff and sore from their wounds and exertions, and wearied with their fighting and constant watching, and hungry and thirsty, for they had little food and less water; while he, if they still refused to surrender, would be in still better shape to attack them, for he expected to be reinforced by

several hundred men and a number of pieces of artillery before morning.

Doubtless, some such reasoning as this prevailed upon General Urrea, for there were no more assaults made on the Texan lines that day, but, as soon as the terrified Mexican troops had been rallied, they were drawn up so as to completely surround the Texans out of range of their guns.

Trav and Tom, following Jed's suggestion, carefully cleaned and loaded their rifles, and then gave what aid they could to the care of the wounded. Sad, sad work that made their young hearts bleed, and effectually killed any longings they might have had to partake of the glories of war.

The day was now near spent, and soon the blackness of a night heavy and wet with fog settled down on the little army of Texans. But, before it became too dark to see, a number of Indians, who had joined the forces of the Mexicans, began creeping up around the Texan lines, taking advantage of every hillock and clump of bushes and tuft of thick grass, and soon came so near that they killed and wounded a number of the Texans. Four of them, who had succeeded in creeping up within a hundred yards, were especially deadly, and aroused the ire of Jed Watkins.

"Consarn them sneakin' varmints!" he exclaimed angrily, as a ball from their guns knocked over a man not six feet from where he stood. "They've played devil tew th' Mexican fiddle 'bout long

enough," and, catching up three extra rifles, he ran to a gun carriage, and, crouching behind it, leveled one of the rifles and waited. The instant one of the Indians showed his head he fired, caught up another of the rifles and almost instantly fired again, and thus, in rapid succession emptied the four guns.

"Did you get them? Did you get them?" Trav inquired eagerly, as he hurried back from the exposed gun carriage, nursing a slight wound in his hand.

"Plumb through th' heads," was his sententious but satisfactory answer.

When it became dark the Texans soon silenced the fire of the remaining Indians, by shooting at the flashes of their guns the instant they were fired—and the fight for that day was done.

Never will Trav and Tom forget the horrors of that long, wearisome night. No one slept, no one could sleep with the agonizing moans of the wounded, who were continually calling for water, sounding in their ears, and there was no water to give them. Neither was there any food; and, hungry and thirsty, the two boys waited in the wet blackness of the night for the daylight that might bring them only wounds and death. In the distance, they could see, as they sat huddled close to Mrs. McNelly, one on either side, the circling lines of Mexican camp-fires, gleaming redly through the darkness and fog, and could hear the continual cry of "*Sentinela alerte*," coming weirdly through the

surrounding blackness, as the Mexican sentries paced back and forth around that little encampment of Texans, keeping careful watch in order that none of their victims might escape.

But, horrible and desperate as was the plight of the Texans, their courage was undaunted; and when Colonel Fannin called them together and told them that their one chance of escape was to retreat to the timbers of the Coletto during the darkness of the night, that it would be too late in the morning, when the Mexicans would undoubtedly receive reinforcements, but that they could not take their wounded with them, for the glory of Texas be it recorded, not one of the men would go and leave their disabled comrades, and it was unanimously decided to remain and fight it out.

The remainder of the night was spent by the Texans in throwing up an earthen breastwork, the bodies of the dead oxen—nearly all of the oxen had been killed during the fighting—and the wagons being used to still further strengthen this barricade.

The moment it became light enough to see Trav and Tom climbed up on top of one of the wagons, anxious to discover what the enemy were doing; and hardly had they reached this point of vantage when the Mexicans began shouting and cheering loudly.

“What ails th’ tarnal critters now?” and Jed Watkins jumped up from the wagon tongue, where he had been sitting smoking his pipe, and anxiously

turned his eyes in the direction of the hurraing. "Hope 'tain't reinforcements. Th' yeller snakes are plenty thick enough as it is."

"But it is, it is reinforcements!" Trav cried excitedly. "I can see them, three or four hundred of them, and they have got cannon with them and a long train of pack mules—"

"And," broke in Tom, "they're getting ready to begin the attack. I can see the officers marshaling their men, and getting the cannon into position to fire at us," and he hastily scrambled down from the wagon-top, followed by Trav, and caught up his rifle.

Colonel Fannin, stiff and lame from his wound, but erect and undaunted as ever, was now shouting out orders to his men, who sprang behind the barricade, prepared again to meet the assaulting thousands with their deadly rifle balls. But General Urrea had learned a lesson from those same deadly rifle balls, and, while an advance was ordered all around the Texans, the Mexicans came forward slowly, waiting for the artillery to get into position and open fire.

The day was Sunday, Passion Sunday, the twentieth of March, 1836, just two weeks after that dread Sunday at the Alamo. Trav and Tom, as they hurried to their position behind the barricade, thought of this other Sunday, and wondered if their fate would be the glorious fate of those brave men. But, no, they had beaten the Mexicans off

yesterday, and they could do it again to-day! Alas, they forgot that to-day the Mexicans had cannon, and yesterday they had only their rifles. Nor did they have long to wait before the dreadful nature of this difference was brought home to them with a shock that shook the whole encampment; for, hardly had they settled themselves down in their places behind one of the barricading wagons, when a cloud of white smoke shot out in front of the Mexican cannon, and the next instant the wagon seemed tumbling about their heads in splinters, and the dirt thrown up by balls plowing through the earthen breastwork was flying all over their bodies, while cries of agony from all around told them how fatal had been the discharge of grape and canister. At the same moment the Mexicans charged, yelling like devils and firing their guns, all around the line; and the cannons roared again and again, knocking the wagons into splinters and plowing through the barricade and the camp, until to Trav and Tom it seemed as if they were in the very midst of an inferno of destruction.

“God A’mighty! God A’mighty, we can’t stand this long!” cried a man, staggering to his feet from beneath a shattered wagon, the blood streaming from a splinter wound in his cheek; and similar cries came from many a stern-faced man, who saw with horror the cannon shot tearing through the wounded and the women and children gathered in the center of the square.

Colonel Fannin, harkening to these cries, hastily summoned his officers together.

"The men are calling to me to surrender," he said, "but we whipped them off yesterday, and we can do it again to-day. I am in favor of continuing the fight."

"But yesterday the enemy had no cannon," protested one of the officers, "while to-day—" A charge of grape whistled by him, cutting the sword out of his hand, by way of emphasizing his statement—"while to-day they have both cannon and reinforcements."

"And our cannon are useless," objected another, "and our men have only a few rounds of ammunition for their rifles left. The wounded and the women and children—"

Another discharge of grapeshot tore through the men, killing the officer who was speaking and wounding a child, whose shrill screams of pain rang in Fannin's ears.

Fannin wavered—yielded.

"Good God, men," he cried, "I would rather die than surrender; but, put it to the vote, put it to the vote, and let the majority decide," and he glared dejectedly around him.

The officers hurried to their men, and a vote was speedily taken. All saw the uselessness of resisting longer; and the vote was almost unanimously in favor of surrender, providing a safe and honorable capitulation might be obtained.

The white flag was at once raised, the firing ceased, and Fannin, accompanied by two of his officers, limped out toward the Mexicans. They were met midway between the lines by three Mexican officers, and conducted to General Urrea.

The terms of surrender were speedily agreed to; and the brave little army of Texans were prisoners of war, to be treated according to the usages of civilized nations. The wounded were to be properly cared for, private property was to be respected, and the volunteers from the States were to be sent to New Orleans, under parole not to serve any more during the war in Texas.

But, alas, Texas had yet to learn another lesson in Mexican perfidy and brutality!

CHAPTER XXIV

VASQUEZ AND BIG IKE AGAIN

THAT night Trav and Tom found themselves back in Goliad, herded, like cattle, with the other male prisoners who were able to walk, some three hundred men, in the gloomy old stone church of the mission buildings. Both boys were in the greatest anxiety, not so much on their own account, as on account of Mrs. McNelly, concerning whose fate they had been unable to learn anything since leaving the battlefield of the Coletto.

"I wish I knew that mother was safe," Trav said, perhaps for the hundredth time, as he squatted down on the hard stone floor of the church by the side of Tom. "We are men, and can stand a little hard usage; but mother isn't—isn't well, and all this trouble all coming together in a bunch I'm afraid will make her down sick, and it would be terrible for her to be sick and have only Mexicans to care for her."

"Yes," agreed Tom, "it would be terrible. But, you know, according to the terms of the surrender, the women and children are not to be treated as prisoners of war, but are to be well cared for and sent to their friends as soon as possible."

"I know. I know," Trav responded gloomily. "But, can we trust the Mexicans? They're not treating us according to agreement. A little chunk of raw meat is all they've given us to eat, and the wounded are not getting any care, and when Colonel Fannin complained to the officers they laughed at him, and maybe the women— Hello! Wonder what's doing now? Hope it's something more to eat," and both boys partly rose, in order to get a better view of an officer and two men, who had just entered the church and had paused for an instant at the door to give a command to the sentry stationed there.

One of the men carried a lantern, for it was dark inside the church; and presently the three began moving slowly down through the rows of prisoners, holding the lantern up to the face of each prisoner as they passed. Apparently they were searching anxiously for someone.

"Who—I wonder who they are looking for? I—" Trav stopped abruptly and clutched Tom by the arm excitedly. "Did you see his face? Did you see his face?" he whispered agitatedly. "The big fellow's with the lantern?"

"Yes," and Tom's voice trembled as he spoke. "It's Big Ike, the man we left tied in that little clump of trees. And—and—" he caught hold of Trav with both hands—"the man with him, the one who is looking so carefully into the face of every prisoner is—is—yes, I am sure, it's Vasquez," and

he shuddered, as he pronounced the name. "Oh, what if they are looking for us?"

For a minute neither boy spoke, but watched with fascinated eyes the slow approach of the three men with the lantern. Not a face escaped their scrutiny.

"Oh, if we could only hide, if we could only hide!" and Trav glanced vainly around for some nook or corner in which they might conceal themselves. Straight and bare and solid the stone walls of the church rose all around them, seen dimly in the light of the lantern, without a sign of a possible hiding-place.

"We can't, we can't hide. There's no place. But," and Tom's eyes brightened, "let's blacken our faces, and maybe Vasquez won't know us," and he thrust both hands down on the stone floor of the church, which was covered with the dirt accumulated from many feet, and began transferring the dirt thus gathered to his face.

Trav instantly followed his example; and in a few moments the faces of both lads were covered with a thick coating of grime, that did much to conceal their natural features.

In the meantime the lantern had been slowly and surely approaching the spot where they crouched as closely to the floor as possible. Now it was only a few feet away—was being held up to the face of the man next to Trav; and now the great hand of Big Ike reached down and, gripping Trav by the

shoulder, jerked his head up into the light of the lantern.

Vasquez bent, and, for an instant, looked searchingly into the face before him. Then, with an oath, he bade Big Ike drop Trav, and turned to Tom.

The hearts of both lads throbbed with hope. Vasquez had not recognized Trav; and, therefore, there was every reason to think that, in the darkness, he would fail to recognize Tom also. The ruse of the blackened faces was succeeding splendidly.

Again the great hand of Big Ike descended; and this time it was the face of Tom that was jerked up and held in the light of the lantern.

Vasquez stooped until his face was almost within a foot of Tom's, and, for an instant, their eyes met. Then, with another Mexican oath, he turned to examine the face of the next man, and Tom, with his heart thumping jubilantly, sank down on the floor, and, gripping one of Trav's hands, squeezed it tightly by way of telegraphing his exultation to his comrade. But, before Vasquez had taken two steps, Big Ike suddenly caught hold of his sleeve and jerked him back.

"Ten thousand devils!" he exclaimed. "The two boys! We forgot the two boys!" and his eyes flashed venomously back to where Trav and Tom crouched, their hearts beginning to thump like drumsticks against their ribs at his words.

"*Carramba!*" and Vasquez whirled about. "The two boys! Saints of my family, grant that it is! Quick, the lantern!" and, like the talons of a hawk, his fingers gripped Trav's shoulders and jerked him to his feet.

For a full minute Vasquez stared straight into Trav's face, his snake-like eyes glittering in the light of the lantern, then his lips drew back from his white teeth in the malignant smile with which Trav was already too familiar, and his whole countenance lighted with malicious triumph.

"*Chingarra!* It is son of Big Sam McNelly, who crack Mexican skulls with bare fist! Look!" and Vasquez pointed a scornful finger at Trav's face. "Like hog, American pig all over dirt. Peuw! he poison to Mexican hands," and, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, he dropped Trav and kicked him with the toe of his boot, as he would have kicked a loathsome toad.

"And I reckon here's his mate," and Big Ike held Tom up to the lantern, while his ugly face glowed with vindictive satisfaction. "You two boys thought 'twas mighty smart to truss up Big Ike, like a gobbling turkey, and leave him for the wolves and the vultures to feed on, didn't you? Now," and the grip of the fingers tightened, "it's Big Ike's turn, and he'll take all that's coming to him right here and now out of your hide," and, suddenly letting go of Tom, he struck him a cruel blow in the face with his clenched fist.

Tom fell to the floor like a log; but, before his body struck the floor, a dozen men—prisoners all—were leaping to their feet, and the next instant the lantern was knocked out of Big Ike's hand, and kicks and blows were landing upon his huge body from every direction, and he was bellowing with fear and pain and yelling for succor.

Vasquez and the officer fled; and, when a few moments later they returned with a guard of soldiers to quell the disturbance and rescue their comrade, their flaring torches showed them Big Ike, the Red Terror of Texas, lying flat on his belly on the floor, his nose in the dirt, hugging his head with both his arms and squealing with fright, like a stuck pig. He had suddenly changed his mind about taking all that was coming to him out of the hide of the boys right there and now.

The soldiers, with curses from their mouths, and prods from their bayonets, and thumps from the butts of their guns, and pricks from the officer's sword, and many dire threats, drove the enraged Texans from the sprawling body of Big Ike; and the discomfited bully staggered to his feet, his face covered with blood and dirt, his body with bruises, his clothing torn, and, swearing vengeance, was hurried from the church, beyond the reach of those undaunted Texans, terrible even when unarmed and prisoners.

Trav's arms were around Tom before his body struck the floor, and he quickly pulled him out of

the way of the men, struggling to get at Big Ike, and bore him to a corner of the church, where he regained consciousness just in time to have the satisfaction of seeing Big Ike, bruised and bleeding and swearing, hurried from the church by the Mexican soldiers away from the vengeance of his comrades.

Vasquez, the moment the soldiers had quieted the Texans, returned to where Trav and Tom sat, this time accompanied by a corporal's guard. The smile was still on his cruel face, but he did not again venture to kick or strike the boys. He had no desire of being taught Texan manners with Texan fists and toes, after witnessing the experiences of Big Ike. For a minute or two he stood gloating over the boys in silence, his snake-like eyes glittering in the torchlight and the smile that parted his lips showing his teeth, like the snarling of a dog.

"I now satisfied," he said at last, folding his arms melodramatically over his bosom. "All Big Sam McNelly, who kill my father and brother, crack skulls with bare fist, love in my power—wife, son, girl, all in my power. Wife and girl I keep for slaves. Make cook, wash, scrub, do all dirty work. Son," and the white teeth gleamed beneath the black mustache, "son, he prisoner of Santa Anna. You think you go free. Yes, oh yes, you go free," and he laughed. "You go free, after killing brave Mexican soldiers! Would that all American pigs might go free same way," and again he laughed. "Now I go make wife of Big Sam McNelly cook for

brave Mexican soldiers. No cook, whip. She my slave," and, making Trav a mock courtesy, he turned on his heels, and, followed by the clanking soldiers and the flaring torches, strode out of the church.

Trav had not answered a word to this tirade—what good would it have done?—but his eyes had blazed and he had clenched his fists tightly, when Vasquez spoke of Kitty and his mother and of how he would make them his slaves.

"If ever I get the chance," he said between his gritted teeth, as Vasquez turned away, "I'll take Davy Crockett's advice and shoot that Mexican skunk same as I would a poison snake. Oh, if I were only free!" and he glared in furious, but vain wrath after the retreating form of the hated Mexican.

The church, by the departure of Vasquez and the officers and the soldiers, had been left to the dim light of a couple of torches placed in holders fastened to the wall, and their flaring flames hardly gave light enough for Tom to see Trav's face, but he knew by the tones of his voice that he had been deeply stirred by the words and boasts of Vasquez, and reaching out he caught hold of his hand and clasped it closely in warm sympathy.

"I know things look mighty tough just now," he said, and the grip on Trav's hand tightened, "and it's terrible hard to be compelled to sit here and do nothing when father and Kitty and Sam and

Mrs. McNelly all need our help; but I don't believe things are really as bad as they look. I—I—I couldn't believe in a just God, if that scoundrel, Vasquez, was allowed to work his wicked will in triumph to the end. You just wait until General Sam Houston gets after Santa Anna, and then these boastful Mexicans will sing to a different tune, and it will be our turn to even things up with Vasquez."

"I—I hope you are right," and Trav returned the reassuring pressure of Tom's hand, "and I know a fellow ought to never say die until he is dead, as Davy Crockett said, and I'm not going to play the baby, only—and his voice trembled—"it's terrible to think of mother and Kitty in the power of such a brute as Vasquez and not to be able to lift a finger to help them."

For a moment the two boys sat, clasping each the hands of the other in silence. They were where words failed to bring them comfort or help. Then Tom gave a slight start, as if something disagreeable had been suddenly recalled to his mind.

"I wonder what Vasquez meant when he wished that all Americans might go free the same way we are to go free. His laugh when he said it made the cold shivers run down my back," and he drew closer to Trav. "General Urrea would not dare to go back on his plighted word, would he?" and again Tom shivered, for the often repeated rumor that Santa Anna had ordered all foreigners—Americans—taken in arms against Mexico, shot,

kept recurring to his mind; and they, and nearly every man in Fannin's captive army, were Americans.

"It would not be the first time a Mexican had broken his plighted word," Trav answered gloomily. "But, what's the use of thinking about it? We've just got to take whatever comes, and make the best of it; and the best thing for us to do now is to try and get some sleep. I did not sleep a wink last night, and I'm plumb tired out. Oh, if I could only snuggle down in one of mother's beds right now! But, even this is better than nothing," and the unfortunate boy stretched his tired frame out on the hard, cold stones of the dirty church floor.

Tom at once followed his example, and, in a few minutes the two boys, so overpoweringly sleepy and tired were they, were both sound asleep, in spite of their present dreadful surroundings and the fearful possibilities of the future.

CHAPTER XXV

A PIECE OF WHITE CLOTH

FOR a week the little army of Fannin was held close prisoners in Goliad, huddled together in the church, like hogs in a pen, and half-starved and brutally treated by their captors. During this time Colonel Ward and the hundred and more men with him, who had been sent by Fannin to the relief of Captain King at Refugio, had been captured by General Urrea, and added to the prisoners already crowded into the church. From them Fannin's men first learned of the fate of Captain King and his men. They had been captured, after a brave resistance, by the Mexicans, tied to posts and shot, and their bodies left hanging there for the buzzards and wolves. Then, a day or two later, another body of prisoners, eighty-two in number, had been brought in and thrust into the crowded church. These were volunteers under Major Miller from Nashville, and had been captured by Colonel Vara immediately on their disembarking at Copano, surrendering without resistance. This made some four hundred prisoners, all crowded into the little stone church, hardly large enough to accommodate half that number.

A white piece of cloth had been tied around the arm of each of the volunteers captured at Copano before they had been thrust into the church; and this marking of these men in this peculiar way had been the cause of much anxiety among the other prisoners. Why had they been thus distinguished from the others, unless they had been reserved for a different fate? Some of the men remembered of having read or heard somewhere of how prisoners had once been thus marked who were to be spared when the others were massacred; and many a strong heart shuddered at the thought of what that bit of white cloth might portend to those who did not wear it. And yet, had they not surrendered as prisoners of war, to be treated according to the usages of civilized nations? Surely, not even Santa Anna would dare to disregard these usages, so far as to kill prisoners who had surrendered under a guarantee of safety. But, all had heard terrible stories of the cruelty and perfidy of Santa Anna; and it was the thought of these stories that made brave men shudder when they saw the bits of white cloth and remembered that the men thus marked had been captured before they had actually fought against Mexico, while the other prisoners had surrendered only after desperate fighting during which many of Santa Anna's bravest soldiers had been killed.

In the midst of these gloomy and terrible forebodings, Colonel Fannin, who had gone to Copano

to see if a boat might be secured to take his men to New Orleans, according to the terms of the capitulation, returned. Colonel Fannin found no boat in the harbor; but he came back convinced of the good faith of the Mexicans, and laughed away the fears of his men.

“We will all see home again soon,” he declared, and his eyes softened and he smiled tenderly, as he thought of his own dear wife and child. “Yes, boys, we are going home, just as soon as a boat arrives at Copano to take us away. It is all arranged.”

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” shouted one of the men joyfully. “Home, and the wife and the kids! ’Twill seem like heaven after this,” and his sunken eyes lighted. “Hurrah for home!”

“Home, home, sweet home. Be it ever so humble there is no place like home,” sang a sweet, clear voice, and almost instantly the voice was joined by the soft notes of a flute that one of the men had managed somehow to retain.

Tears were in the eyes of both the singer and the player, and tears were rolling down the bearded cheeks of their listeners, as they crowded round the musicians and joined in the singing.

Mexican officers, pausing for a few minutes inside the church, listened wonderingly to the glad voices of the prisoners, and some of them went away sadly shaking their heads and muttering, “*Pobrecitos! Pobrecitos!*” (poor fellows! poor

fellows!). Late in the evening—the prisoners, full of thoughts of the homes and the dear ones they expected soon to see again, continued their rejoicings until late at night—Colonel Portilla, who had been left in command at Goliad by General Urrea, entered the church and stood for a few minutes near the doorway listening to the mad Americanos. When told the cause of the rejoicing he became greatly agitated and hurried away, muttering angrily and indignantly to himself something about his not being a butcher. A little while after his departure, Vasquez and Big Ike came in and stood, leering and smiling, in the doorway. Big Ike had never ventured within reach of the hands of the Texans since the night he had struck Tom, and this was the first time the boys had seen Vasquez since that same night. Now the little snake-eyes of the Mexican were shining with triumph, as they rested gloatingly on the forms of Trav and Tom in the midst of the singing Americans, and the huge, red-whiskered face of Big Ike was glowing with some strong emotion that made him look more like a fiend than ever. But neither Trav nor Tom nor any of the other Texans paid the slightest attention to them; and, after standing in the doorway for some ten minutes, they both passed out of the church, laughing boisterously, as if they had just witnessed an exceedingly funny joke.

“Oh, but I am glad the Mexicans are going to treat us fair after all,” Trav said, when at last he

and Tom stretched themselves out on the hard, dirty floor of the church to go to sleep, after the rejoicing had quieted down. "I had begun to fear that something dreadful was going to happen; but I guess it is all right now."

"But, did you see the faces of Vasquez and Big Ike? Did you see their faces as they stood in the doorway? I caught the eye of Vasquez once, and he drew his hand across his throat and grinned. What do you suppose he meant?" and Tom shuddered.

"The cowardly skunk!" and Trav's jaws snapped together. "He was just trying to frighten us, trying to spoil the good news Fannin had brought. But, I don't want to think of him. I'm going to sleep," and Trav rolled over and resolutely closed his eyes; and in a few minutes more both boys were sound asleep and dreaming of their dear homes in the little log cabins, where they had passed so many happy hours.

CHAPTER XXVI

ONE PALM SUNDAY MORNING

THE next morning, Sunday, Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836, Trav and Tom were awakened early by the blare of bugles and the loud beatings of drums; and a few minutes later officers hurried into the church and ordered the prisoners to fall in line by companies.

"I wonder what is up now," Trav said, his eyes beginning to sparkle, as he and Tom fell in line and marched out of the church. "Maybe they are getting ready to send us home. Anyway it seems mighty good to get out of that old church, and to breathe fresh, clean air again."

"Shouldn't wonder if they were going to march us to Copano," Tom replied. "So that those who are going to New Orleans can be there ready to take the boat when it comes. The Mexicans are not so bad after all, are they?"

"Jest hold onto tew your decision 'bout th' Mexies 'til we're out of th' woods," warned Jed Watkins, who marched directly behind the two boys. "I don't like th' look in them officers' eyes a little bit. 'Minds me of th' eyes of a rattler, jest afore it strikes."

By this time the prisoners were all out of the church; and the officers now lined them up in double file between two rows of fully-armed Mexican soldiers, and formed them into three divisions.

"Where are we bound for now, cap?" Jed Watkins asked, as the officer in charge of his division passed.

"Home. You all go home quick, now," and his black eyes glittered. "No be prisoners much longer. Soon all free," and his laugh was joined in by the soldiers standing near.

"Wal, it sounds mighty curious tew hear a Mexican laugh when a prisoner is tew be set free, danged if it don't," and Jed Watkins's eyes searched the face of the officer suspiciously. "Mighty curious," and he glanced up and down the long lines of waiting prisoners. "An' thar ain't a white-ragged arm 'mong th' lot. Reckon some Mexican devilment is brewin', but what, is more'n I can tell."

At this moment the command to march was given, and the three divisions started off in three different directions, with armed Mexican soldiers on each side of them and squads of cavalry following in their rear.

"Wal, I swun, if we ain't takin' th' road tew Copano!" and Jed Watkins's face cleared. "Never knowed a Mexican tew tell th' truth afore, when a lie would do as well. But we sure have started for Copano all right," and something of the look of suspicion went out of his rugged face.

As the little band of Texan prisoners marched through the streets of the town between the rows of Mexican soldiers, many of the Mexican women, watching them from the doors and windows of the houses, looked at them pityingly and murmured, "*Pobrecitos! Pobrecitos!*" (poor fellows! poor fellows!); and once, when passing near a monastery, Trav and Tom felt a few drops of water falling on them, and, on looking up, saw a priest leaning over the parapet of the flat roof of the monastery and sprinkling holy water down upon the heads of the passing prisoners. But, at that moment, neither boy thought of the terrible significance of this action.

By the side of Trav marched a couple of Mexican soldiers, who, as they walked along, eyed him closely and once or twice appeared to be trying to attract his attention. There was something in the forms and faces of these men that looked familiar to Trav, and yet he could not remember who they were, nor where he had seen them.

"Just take a look at those two fellows marching alongside of me," Trav at length whispered to Tom. "I'm sure I've seen them before, and they act as if they knew me and wanted to tell me something. See if you know them."

"No, I can't think who they are," Tom whispered back, after he had looked at the men. "But their faces certainly do look familiar; and I am sure they know us and don't want their comrades to know

that they know us. One of them put his finger to his lips and shook his head, while I was looking at him, as much as to say, 'don't let anybody know that you know us.' I wonder who they can be? and what they mean?— Now, now, what are we going out into that field for?" and a look of alarm came into Tom's face, as the line of prisoners was suddenly deflected from the road and turned into an open field, not more than half a mile from the town.

"Jumpin' grasshoppers!" and Jed Watkins turned a startled face to the soldiers. "What are we goin' in thar for?"

"Just to give you a rest, a long rest," laughed one of the soldiers.

Before Jed could answer, the line of prisoners was halted a few feet from a ditch, alongside of which grew a scattered hedge of bushes. Then, at a sudden command, the line of Mexican soldiers on Trav's side of the prisoners, the side next to the ditch, passed swiftly through their ranks and joined the line of soldiers on the opposite side. As one of the Mexicans, who had attracted Trav's and Tom's attention, was about to pass the boys, he suddenly lurched toward Trav, and the two went to the ground together.

"Me friend—Listen," and the fellow hugged Trav so closely that his mouth was next to Trav's ear, while he appeared to be struggling furiously with him. "Just before shoot, drop quick, flat.

Then, after shoot, jump up quick and run through bushes. Maybe no catch, no kill," and the man, his mouth pouring forth a string of Mexican oaths at Trav for tripping him up, leaped to his feet, gave Trav a brutal kick, and sprang to his place in the ranks.

For an instant Trav's mind was in too great a whirl for him to think clearly or to comprehend exactly what the Mexican meant. Then it all came to him in a flash, and, with a cry of horror, he jumped to his feet.

"God in heaven, they are going to shoot us!" he yelled; and then, as he heard the sharp commands of the Mexican officers ordering the prisoners to turn their backs on the soldiers and sit down, he gripped Tom by the shoulders and whispered frantically: "Drop flat on the ground the moment you hear the command to shoot. Jump up and run the moment they shoot. Do you—do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," came from Tom's white lips. "Oh, this is awful!"

"Don't turn your backs. Don't set down. Face th' devils. Fall flat on your faces th' instant before they shoot. Then up and leg it across th' ditch—Now, shoot and be damned!" and Jed Watkins whirled and faced the Mexican soldiers, his eyes flaming with an honest man's wrath at the brutal treachery of their cowardly action.

A number of the prisoners standing near followed Jed's example, and, refusing to turn their

backs, resolutely faced the soldiers drawn up not ten paces away; and one of them, pulling off his cap and waving it around his head, shouted: "Hurrah for Texas! Liberty and Texas!"

Trav and Tom, their eyes intently watching every movement of the soldiers, their every muscle tense, their faces white and lips tightly compressed, stood ready, waiting for the fatal instant when life would depend on the quickness of their actions; and by their sides stood the long line of prisoners, waiting, all waiting, for the Mexican bullets. Not a cry for mercy! not a voice was raised in vain pleadings for life; not a coward among that splendid body of American manhood! And many of them were but little more than boys!

The wait was brief. Almost at the instant of the shout, "Liberty and Texas!" the command was given, and the guard threw their guns to their shoulders.

"Fire!"

And all along the line the muskets flamed; and all along the line the prisoners fell, writhing with death-wounds, to the ground; but, here and there among the number, one jumped to his feet, and, rushing through the hedge and leaping across the ditch, raced for his life across the prairie beyond, with the shouting Mexican cavalry galloping hard after him.

At the instant the command, "Fire!" was given, Trav and Tom fell flat on their faces. They heard

the bullets whiz above their heads as they fell, they heard the cries of agony from the hit men around them; and then both boys jumped to their feet, plunged through the hedge, jumped the ditch, and were running madly across the open prairie beyond, before they really knew what they were doing.

"Are you hit? 'Are you hit?'" Trav asked anxiously. Tom was running only a few feet from his side.

"No. Are you?"

"Not a scratch," and Trav glanced fearfully behind him.

"Hurry! Hurry!" he shouted. "There are two of the soldiers after us! Hurry! Hurry! They're not more than a couple of rods behind," and he redoubled his own efforts.

Tom turned his head, and saw two Mexicans, the naked blades of their knives gleaming in their hands, running close behind them. It needed no second glance to tell that they were after Trav and him. He also saw the Mexican cavalry galloping after other fleeing Texans, shooting at them with their carbines and pistols, and thrusting at them with their long lances.

"Make for the woods! Make for the woods!" he shouted to Trav, at the same time turning a little to their right, where the outskirts of a thick belt of timber showed. "It's our only chance to get away from those devils behind us."

A number of the cavalymen saw the boys, but

they also saw the two Mexicans so close behind that they looked as if they were about to overtake the fugitives, and they left them to their knives. There were other fleeing Texans that appeared to be more in need of their bullets and lances.

As Trav and Tom ran they heard many shots and cries from behind and around them, and from a distance came the sounds of volleys and scattered firing, which told them that the other two divisions of prisoners had met with the same dreadful fate.

For half the distance to the woods the Mexicans did not seem to gain a foot on the boys, then, slowly, inch by inch, they drew nearer, until, when the panting boys plunged in among the trees, they were not ten feet behind them.

The two boys were less than four feet apart and running side by side, when they entered the woods. Both saw a narrow opening through a thick clump of bushes, and both sprang for it at the same instant, with the result that they collided so violently that they were hurled to the ground, and fell one on top of the other. Before either lad could scramble to his feet the two Mexicans were upon them, their knives gleaming wickedly in their hands; and Trav and Tom found themselves struggling in the grips of the two Mexican soldiers who had attracted their attention just before the shooting began.

“No yell!—No yell!” one of the men whispered excitedly, as they held the two boys tightly. “We

friends—No hurt; maybe save—No yell—Keep still,” and they hastily dragged the two boys farther into the clump of bushes, where they were completely hidden from anyone passing near.

Trav and Tom stared in amazement into the faces of the two men. Both looked familiar, yet they could recollect neither.

“You not know,” and one of the men smiled. “We two Mexican soldiers you wound in fight; but not kill, no leave for wolves to eat. Take with you. Woman, with face like holy saints, care for wounds. Make well. We no forget. Save you, if can,” and again the Mexicans smiled reassuringly.

The boys understood now why the faces of the Mexicans looked so familiar. They were the two men who had been left on the field wounded, when they had been so gallantly rescued from Vasquez by Davy Crockett and Sam McNelly and their comrades, and who had subsequently escaped during the street rioting in San Antonio.

“Now,” and one of the Mexicans pointed to a depression in the ground made by the upturned roots of a tree. “Crawl in there. We cover with leaves, all but mouths. Stay there till night. When dark, go east fast as legs can take you. Maybe escape. Hurry. No waste time,” and again he pointed to the depression.

Both boys understood the value of every minute too well to pause, even to thank their rescuers more

than by a hastily spoken word and a warm grip of the hand, and made haste to crawl into the hole dug by the uprooting of the tree.

“Here, take knives. Sorry, no got guns,” and the two Mexicans handed Trav and Tom their knives, as the boys crouched down in the hole. “Now, keep very still. No crawl out ’til dark,” and, gathering up the fallen leaves that here covered the ground, the Mexicans scattered them over the boys until they were completely hidden from sight. Then, to further add to their security, they threw on top of the leaves a little pile of loose dry brush, and, after carefully arranging the whole to look as near as possible as if it had lain there undisturbed for some time, they silently departed, leaving Trav and Tom so securely hidden that a dozen Mexican soldiers might pass within a few feet of them and never have the least suspicion of their presence.

As for Trav and Tom they lay very still, meditating with exceedingly thankful hearts upon this new and more pleasing phase of Mexican character, which, like a lily in a morass, had blossomed in the midst of one of the most brutal and cruel massacres in all history.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GREAT ROCK ON THE HILL

THROUGHOUT that long March day Trav and Tom lay hidden underneath the brush and leaves, a prey to a thousand dreadful fears for themselves and those dear to them. Again and again Mexican soldiers, in search of hiding fugitives, passed within a few feet of their place of concealment; and once the soldiers found a poor fellow so near to where the boys lay that they heard his cry of agony when the bayonets were thrust through him. But, fortunately, so skilfully had the two friendly Mexicans concealed their hiding-place, that they were not found. For a couple of hours they heard an occasional shot and the sound of the man-hunters tramping through the brush of the surrounding woods; then the silence of the dead settled down over prairie and trees.

The Mexicans had completed their dreadful work. Fannin and his little army were no more.

Slowly the hours of daylight passed; and, at last, the sun went down, and the dark shadows of night fell across the prairie and gathered underneath the trees and lay thick and black around the little clump

of bushes in the midst of which Trav and Tom had awaited the coming of darkness with an impatient anxiety that had made their bed of leaves an exceedingly uncomfortable place long before night. But it was not until the darkness became so dense that a tree a rod away was invisible to their eyes, that they ventured to leave their hiding-place. Then, as noiselessly as possible, they pushed the brush off that lay on top of them and crawled out of the leaves. For a few minutes they paused to stretch and rub their stiffened limbs; and then, moving as cautiously as Indians, they hurried through the woods to the prairie beyond, and, taking their direction from the stars shining in a clear, moonless sky, started off across the lonely prairie, going as nearly directly east as possible.

So far neither boy had spoken a word concerning the dreadful massacre. The horrors of it were too vividly in their minds for either lad to care to talk about them. But now, as they paused for a few minutes' breathing on the summit of a little hill some two miles from the woods, and, looking back, saw in the distance the twinkling lights of Goliad, both boys shuddered and Tom said: "I can't make it seem real. It's like some horrible dream."

"I wish it was a dream! I wish it was a dream!" Trav, repeated gloomily. "To think of all of those brave fellows murdered! It's terrible! Horrible! I don't see how anyone can trust to the honor of a Mexican after this."

“And yet,” Tom reminded him, “we owe our lives to the honor of two Mexican soldiers.”

“I know. I do not forget,” Trav answered. “And yet they were only two out of hundreds. Maybe I am too bitter, but when I think of Fannin and the poor fellows murdered with him, I can almost wish an earthquake would happen and swallow up all Mexico. Oh, I know it is wrong to talk that way, but I can’t help it. And—and mother and Kitty and possibly our fathers are still in the hands of those devils! And we can do nothing, nothing, to help them!” and the poor, overwrought boy’s voice trembled. “We can do little even for ourselves, without food and without weapons, alone in this wilderness, which, now that Fannin has been conquered, will be overrun with Mexicans.”

“Yes, we can,” Tom answered firmly. “We can find General Sam Houston just as soon as possible. As long as Houston is left there is hope for Texas. And we are not without weapons. You forget the knives the Mexicans left us. Just think what we’ve escaped and keep up courage. We’ll come out on top yet. Just wait and see if we don’t. But this is too dangerous a region for us to be standing here. We must be going and get as far away from Goliad as possible before morning.”

“You’re right,” Trav agreed, the look of courage and determination coming back into his face. “We must get away from here and to General Sam Houston just as speedily as we can. Come on,” and,

without more words, the two boys hurried on over the dark and silent prairie.

Remember, boys, before you condemn Trav's momentary weakness, all that he had been called upon to endure during that terrible day—the horrors of the massacre, the race for life across the plains, the unexpected rescue, the suspense and dread of the long hours under the brush heap and the dead leaves, the agony of the thought of what might be happening to his mother and Kitty, and then add to all this the fact that the only food he had had during the last twenty-four hours was a little chunk of raw meat given to him early that morning—remember all these things and you will not wonder at his weakness, only at the courage and pluck and endurance that enabled these two boys to strike out so bravely and uncomplainingly across the desolate plains, armed only with knives where a gun was almost as essential to life as food.

All that night the tired boys hurried on eastward, without seeing any other signs of human life than the distant camp-fires of a detachment of Mexican soldiers; and, when the light of day came, they crept into the thick brush, growing along the banks of a small stream of water, and lay there hidden until the darkness of night came, when they resumed their eastward journey. They found in the brush the nest of a wild turkey, with half a dozen eggs in it, and these, with a couple of quails they knocked over with stones, all eaten raw—they did not dare

to build a fire—was their only food for that day and the next.

Thus, for a week, the plucky boys wandered alone over vast plains and through great forests and cane-brakes, traveling only at night and keeping their direction as best they could by the stars. For food they ate anything they could find or kill that was eatable—the eggs of birds, small animals knocked down with stones or their knives, and turtles and shell fish from the rivers, cooked over fires kindled by sparks struck from flints by their knives, whenever they thought it safe to build a fire.

They frequently saw the camp-fires of the Mexican soldiers at night, and sometimes during the day, troops of cavalry passed near their hiding-places, but never once did the Mexicans catch sight of the boys. They had had their fill of Mexican captivity, and avoided every sign of a Mexican as they would the plague. Everywhere they saw evidences of the terror into which the whole country had been thrown by the coming of the Mexicans. All the settlers had fled, and their abandoned homes and crops had been destroyed by the bands of ravaging Mexicans that swept over the country. The entire region through which the boys were passing had been left to the Mexicans, the wolves, and the buzzards.

“I think it will be safe for us to travel by sunlight now,” Trav declared on the morning of the seventh day out from Goliad. “We didn’t see a

sign of a Mexican last night nor the day before, and I'm getting mighty tired of stumbling along through the darkness."

"So am I," Tom acquiesced. "Oh, dear, I wonder if we ever will get out of this wilderness and see a friendly human face again. Let us climb to the the top of that hill and have a look around, and then, if there are no Mexicans in sight, we'll go on," and Tom pointed to a hill that rose high above the level of the prairie a mile away.

Directly on top of the hill a huge rock thrust its head out of the ground a dozen or more feet up in the air; and toward this rock Trav and Tom now cautiously made their way, intending to utilize it as a screen while they examined the country beyond. The side of the rock toward Trav and Tom rose almost perpendicularly up out of the ground, as if some Titan in the ages past had cut a slice off it with a huge knife, while the other side sloped steeply downward from its top to the ground. When the two boys reached this precipitous side they paused for a moment behind its shelter.

"You take a look from that end of the rock," Trav said to Tom, "and I'll have a look from this end," and Trav started toward one end of the rock, while Tom went to the other.

In less than a minute both boys were back near the center of the rock, their faces white and excited.

"There's a lot of Mexican soldiers camped alongside a little river not more than a couple of miles from here," Trav whispered, as if fearful that the distant Mexicans might hear his voice, if he spoke aloud.

"I know. I saw them," Tom answered, speaking also in a whisper. "There must be four or five hundred of them, cavalry and infantry. And one of their mounted pickets is not more than a mile from this rock. What shall we do now?"

"I don't know just yet," Trav replied doubtfully. "But we certainly can't go on now. Let's watch them for a while and think," and he started back to his end of the rock, while Tom again sought the other end.

For fully half an hour the two boys lay, intently watching the scene at the Mexican encampment; then, suddenly, both lads sprang to their feet and hurried toward each other.

"They are coming—the cavalry—right toward us!" gasped Tom.

"Yes," cried Trav. "We must get away from here as fast as our legs will take us. Come," and he started to run down the slope of the hill; but, before he had taken six steps, he stopped abruptly and dropped down into the grass that here grew a foot and a half high, shouting to Tom as he did so: "Down, down quick! There's a lot more Mexicans coming across the plains!"

Tom gave one glance ahead of him across the treeless plain, and saw a body of Mexican cavalry not more than a mile away, riding slowly toward the rock on the hilltop, and dropped in the grass by the side of Trav, who lay near what appeared to be a large wolf hole dug in the top of the hill near the rock.

“What—what can we do? They’re coming from both sides of the hill right toward this rock, and there’s no place to hide,” and Tom gripped hold of Trav’s shoulder excitedly. “If we try to run they will see us and easily catch us with their horses, and, if we stay here, they are sure to find us. Oh, what shall we do?”

Trav, before answering, crept to the little bare spot in front of the wolf hole, and, cautiously lifting his head, peered over the top of the grass. There was not a tree, nor a clump of bushes, nor a rock in sight behind which they might hide.

“We’ve got to run,” he said, crouching down again. “Both parties are headed straight for this rock, and if we stay here they are sure to find us. Maybe if we bend low when we run they won’t see us, and we can get far enough away to hide in the grass until they have passed. Are you ready?” and Trav, in order to get a good start, thrust his feet a little ways down into the wolf hole.

“Yes, yes,” Tom replied, crouching ready to jump to his feet.

“Then—Oh-h-h-h!” and Trav’s voice ended in a yell of alarm, while Tom’s startled eyes saw him suddenly disappear in the wolf hole, as if caught and drawn in by some irresistible force.

For a couple of minutes Tom sat as if every muscle had been suddenly paralyzed, staring blankly into the mouth of the hole, too dumbfounded to utter a word or to make a move. Then his bulging eyes saw a furry head slowly thrusting itself up out of the hole, followed by a pair of shoulders; and the next moment the astounded boy was looking into the eyes of his father, shining with gladness underneath his coonskin cap, and in another moment he was in his father’s arms.

“My boy—” At that instant Jonas Gifford caught sight of the Mexican cavalry. “My God, the Mexicans!” he cried. “In with you, quick!” and he pointed to the wolf hole.

For an instant Tom hesitated. Even after he had seen his father come out of it he did not like the looks of that wolf hole. Then, aided by a strong shove from his father, he plunged head first down into it, and began crawling along on his hands and knees; for, once in the hole, he found that it had been enlarged sufficiently to allow a large man to move along on his hands and knees in comfort.

“Keep right on,” urged his father, who was following close behind him. “This is the slickest hiding-place in all America.”

A moment later Tom's head came in contact with a heavy skin hung across the hole; and the next instant he tumbled headlong into a small cave, whose floor was some three feet below the level of the hole.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MESSAGE IN THE KNIFE SHEATH

TOM GIFFORD was never more surprised in his life than he was at the moment when he struggled to his feet, after his tumble in the wolf hole, and found himself standing in a little cave lighted by tallow candles, with Big Sam McNelly shaking one hand as if he wished to jerk the arm from his shoulder, and Long Bill, the hunter, shaking the other, and Trav and his father standing near grinning. Then, for a few minutes, that little room in the rock fairly buzzed with words and excited exclamations, while all tried to talk at once; but at length the excitement quieted down sufficiently for Trav and Tom to tell their story and to listen to that of their fathers and Long Bill.

The men had heard of the massacre of Fannin and his army, and had supposed that Trav and Tom had been murdered along with the others. Consequently you can imagine their surprise and joy, when the man Big Sam McNelly pulled into the cave, thinking he had captured a Mexican, turned out to be Trav, and how swiftly Tom's father had hurried out to him the moment he knew that the boy was outside.

Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford and Long Bill had been constantly on the trail of the illusive Vasquez; but so cunningly had the rascal concealed his movements that it was not until some five days before that they had acquired definite knowledge of his whereabouts. Then they learned that he and Big Ike had left Goliad, taking Kitty and her mother with them, bound for the army of Santa Anna, and going under the protection of General Cos, who had been ordered to join Santa Anna with five hundred men. Since then they had been doggedly following the army of General Cos, vainly hoping for an opportunity to rescue Kitty and her mother. It was this army of General Cos that the boys had seen camped on the plains beyond the rock on the hilltop; and, doubtless, it was a detachment of his cavalry, hurrying to overtake him, that had come so near to running them into a trap, from which there appeared no escape until the startling wolf-hole episode occurred that had so nearly frightened the wits out of the two lads.

"But how, how in the world did you find this wonderful cave?" and Trav's eyes circled the little rock-cavern in wonder. "How did you know that wolf hole led into such a place as this?"

"We didn't know," and Big Sam McNelly laughed, "until Long Bill here told us. We're right in the midst of his old hunting-grounds, where he has hunted and trapped for years; and once, when close chased by Indians and seeing that the hole

looked big enough to crawl into, he dove into it and kept on crawling until he tumbled into the cave, same as Tom did. Well, he fooled the Indians good and plenty and found the slickest hiding-place in all Texas. Since then he's always kept the cave provisioned and ready for use in case of need; and last night when he found General Cos had camped near the cave, why he just naturally told us about it, and we crawled right in here, where we've been as safe and as snug as a bug in a rug. Of course there's to be no telling anybody else about this cave, except as a last resort. That's in the agreement."

Trav and Tom promptly sanctioned this agreement; and now, for the first time, their eyes had leisure to carefully examine their surroundings. The cave was about seven feet high and some twelve feet long by ten feet wide, just a jagged hole in the great rock that outcropped on the summit of the hill, and which in the course of time had been buried underneath the accumulating dirt of the centuries and had remained hidden from all eyes, until a fortunate wolf or other large animal, in digging a hole, had discovered it.

Long Bill had furnished the cave with blankets, dried meat and coffee and sugar, and also, with a couple of good rifles and an abundance of ammunition. The rifles were at once turned over to Trav and Tom, to their very great delight and satisfaction. A rude but strong door at the entrance to the cave kept out all wild animals, when the cave was

unoccupied, while the skin curtain, when the cave was in use, stopped the light from showing outside.

After the hungry boys had eaten bountifully of the meal Long Bill had at once prepared for them, they were told to lie down on the blankets in a corner of the cave and go to sleep, that nothing could be done now but to follow General Cos and that it would probably be four or five hours before the Mexicans would be far enough away for it to be safe to venture after them. Trav and Tom, who were as tired and sleepy, now that their hunger had been appeased and all immediate danger passed, as two boys could very well be, most gladly availed themselves of this opportunity to get the rest they so badly needed, and, in a very few minutes, were sound asleep on the blankets.

Not until near the middle of the afternoon, when Long Bill, who had been out scouting, reported the coast clear and time to be again on the trail, did Sam McNelly awake Trav and Tom. Ten minutes later all were ready to leave the cave, that, to the boys at least, had proven such a blessed haven of refuge.

Sam McNelly crawled out through the hole first. He was followed by the two boys and Jonas, Long Bill coming last in order that he might put out the candles and close the door of his unique hiding-place.

Not a Mexican was in sight when they all stood on top of the ground again; but there were plenty

of signs to show that a large number of them had stopped for some time near the big rock, for the ground all around the rock was cut up by the hoofs of their horses, as Trav and Tom noticed with a shudder and a backward glance of thankfulness toward the wolf-hole opening to the cave.

There was no difficulty whatever in following the trail of General Cos and his army, for it was as plain as a beaten wagon road; and our friends hurried swiftly along, their keen eyes constantly searching the surrounding country for the enemy and ever on the lookout for some sign that might tell them something of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty, a torn piece of dress, a button, a pocket trinket—anything that the brave woman could leave behind without awakening the suspicions of her captors, to show her friends, should they be following, that they were on the right trail. Twice Sam McNelly had found such evidences of her shrewdness. Once it was a piece of Kitty's dress, deftly tied to a bush near where the Mexicans had camped; and only the day before he had found a couple of peculiarly-shaped buttons, strung on a buckskin thong, in a discarded broken camp-kettle. The piece of cloth he knew had come from Kitty's dress, because he had seen her mother weave it; and the buttons he had bought himself for Mrs. McNelly. So he felt well assured that Vasquez and his prisoners were still with General Cos and his army.

A little while before sundown they came to where

General Cos had halted his army for the noon-day meal; and here Trav found an old leather knife-sheath thrust between two stones. He picked it up and examined it eagerly. Anything might contain a message from the loved ones. But his examination revealed nothing, and he threw the sheath down impatiently. The sheath struck one of the stones and the jar knocked a crumpled piece of coarse paper out of it. Trav grabbed the piece of paper, smoothed it out, and gave a glad shout that brought all the others to him on the jump.

"It's from mother!" he cried. "It's from mother!" and he kissed the crumpled bit of paper in his hand. "Hurrah, it's from mother!"

"But what does it say? Read it," and Sam McNelly caught hold of his arm and looked anxiously at the paper. "Stop your dancing and read it."

The paper was some six inches square, and on one side of it had been written with a bit of charred coal these words:

"To the one finding this.

"My little daughter and I are held captives by a Mexican named Vasquez. He is taking us to Santa Anna to get his permission to take us to Mexico, where he expects to treat us like slaves. I implore anyone who finds this to do everything possible to

rescue us, and beg him for the sake of the mother or wife or daughter that he loves, to get word to Samuel McNelly, my husband. General Cos is on his way to join the forces of Santa Anna, and Vasquez goes with him for the protection of his army. We are in no great danger while with the army of General Cos; but, heaven help us, if Vasquez once gets us to Mexico.

“— JANE MCNELLY.”

When Trav finished reading the above words there was a look of relief on all the anxious faces around him. It assured them that Kitty and her mother were in no serious danger, just at present, and that they were following the right trail—the best of news under the circumstances.

“I reckon there is nothing else for us to do,” and Sam McNelly’s eyes searched the circle of surrounding faces, “but to keep on following the trail, until General Cos unites with Santa Anna; and then—well, Kitty and her mother won’t go to Mexico along with that skunk, Vasquez,” and Sam McNelly’s face hardened and his eyes glinted savagely, “not while Sam McNelly is a-top the ground.”

“I’m with you there, Sam,” and Jonas Gifford gripped Sam McNelly’s hand and shook it warmly. “The good Lord will surely show us a way to get

Mrs. McNelly and Kitty out of that villain's clutches. Never fear, Sam, 'twill come out all right in the end."

"An' I'm thinkin' Santa Anna won't git out of Texas afore old Sam Houston gits after him," Long Bill declared. "An' when he does thar'll be some Mexican fur flyin', or I don't know Ginerol Sam. I'm figgerin' on somethin' happenin' afore long now. Them Mexies are gettin' a long way from home, an' I reckon Ginerol Sam's got a surprise party waitin' for 'em somewhar up his sleeve. Then'll be th' time for us tew git after this Vasquez, tooth and nail, when thar ain't a hull army of Mexies around him. But, we'd better be a-joggin' along," and he glanced impatiently toward the trail of the Mexican army, "or we'll be late tew supper tew-night."

Sam McNelly was right. There was nothing our friends could do but follow the trail of the army of General Cos, and see that they did not get caught themselves, and be ready to act when the time for acting came. The odds of three men and two boys against five hundred Mexican soldiers were too great; and there was little likelihood of Vasquez, under such circumstances, giving them an opportunity to rescue Kitty and her mother, so they were forced to be content to keep vigilant eyes on the Mexican army and to follow as close behind it as they dared.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TWO HORSEMEN

THE country through which the army of General Cos was now marching was, for the most part, a roadless and bridgeless wilderness of hills and plains and forests and rivers and canebrakes, where every settler's cabin had been abandoned and every town and cluster of houses deserted by the terrified inhabitants. Consequently the progress of the army was slow, and it was not until some two weeks after the union of Trav and Tom with their fathers that General Cos crossed the Brazos River and hurried on toward Harrisburg, near which place he expected to find Santa Anna and his army.

During all this time our friends had not relaxed their vigilant watchfulness for a moment; but nothing had occurred to reward their efforts, so closely and securely were Mrs. McNelly and Kitty guarded in the midst of those five hundred soldiers, nor had they been able to find any other token or message from the prisoners, since Trav found the paper in the knife sheath. Still they felt sure that Mrs. McNelly and Kitty were with the army of General Cos; but their inability to do anything to help them, to even let them know that they were trying to effect

their rescue, and the suspense and anxiety of it all had been particularly wearing on Trav and his father, who were fast becoming desperate and were restrained from making some perilous venture into the camp of the Mexicans only by the wiser counsel of their comrades.

So far they had not met a single Texan, and had had no news of how the war was going in Texas. The army of General Cos had driven everyone friendly to Texas far from its route, leaving only the buzzards and the wolves and our friends in their wake. Consequently, when on the morning of the twentieth of April, the day after they had crossed the Brazos, they saw a couple of men on horseback ride out of one of the islands, or "motts" of timber that dotted the plain, half a mile to the north, and gallop swiftly and fearlessly toward them, they instantly concluded they were friends.

"They are Texans, they must be Texans," cried Trav, as the excited lad watched the advancing horsemen, "or they would not dare to gallop toward us like that."

"Sure they're Texans," Long Bill answered a bit scornfully. "No Mexican ever sat a saddle like them two riders."

"Hurrah, now we shall hear what has been happening in Texas!" shouted Tom. "Hope they've licked Santa Anna out of his boots."

In the meantime the two riders had been coming rapidly nearer. Now they were so close that the

features of the two men could be distinguished, and Long Bill gave a glad shout.

"Deaf Smith, as sure as I am a borned sinner!" he yelled, and, striking his spurs into his horse, he galloped swiftly toward the small, bronze-skinned man who rode a few feet in advance of his companion.

"Jed Watkins! It's Jed Watkins!" cried Trav, almost at the same moment, as he caught a clear view of the face of the second horseman. "Hurrah, the Mexicans didn't get you after all!" and he and Tom raced their horses to see who would first grip the honest hand of the old hunter.

Ten minutes later they were all gathered around Deaf Smith, who sat on a large stone, listening to what had been happening in Texas during the past two or three weeks. Words with Deaf Smith were as valuable as bullets. He never wasted either, when he could help it. And in another ten minutes he had told how General Houston and his little army had slowly retreated from Gonzales before the advancing forces of Santa Anna, until now both armies had crossed the Brazos.

"But," interrupted Sam McNelly at this point excitedly, "didn't Sam Houston do nothing to try to stop the Mexicans. He didn't give Santa Anna free passage half way across Texas without so much as firing off a gun to stop him, did he?"

"That's jest what he did," was Deaf Smith's laconic reply.

"'Tain't like Sam Houston. 'Taint like Sam

Houston. I don't understand such actions in General Sam Houston," muttered Sam McNelly indignantly.

"You ain't th' only one that don't understand his not wantin' tew fight th' Mexies afore," Deaf Smith replied. "There's been some mighty hard talk 'mong th' men, 'mountin' almost tew mutiny. Howsomever, spite of it all, General Houston has kept his own counsel, an' kept retreatin'; but now," and the leathery face of the old scout hardened and his eyes lighted, "I reckon he's got Santa Anna 'bout where he wants him, an' there's goin' tew be a fight. Th' men are mighty riled over th' butcheries at th' Alamo an' Goliad, an' jest spilin' tew get at th' Mexicans."

"Whar is General Houston an' his army now?" demanded Long Bill eagerly. "I knowed General Sam had somethin' up his sleeve that he'd show up when th' proper time came."

"They're hoofin' it fast as legs can take 'em for Lynch's Ferry at th' junction of Buffalo Bayou with th' San Jacinto, tew get there afore Santa Anna comes."

"How far is that from here?"

"'Bout twenty-five miles."

"I move," and Long Bill glanced anxiously around the circle of interested faces, "that we strike straight for General Houston 'long with Deaf Smith. We can't make no rescue of th' woman an' gal until we've licked th' Mexican army an' got that

Vasquez whar we can git at him, an' seein' that he's bound tew be with Santa Anna when th' fight takes place, seems tew me that's the place for us tew be. Leastwise I'm mighty anxious tew be in that scrimmage. Thar was some scores made at th' Alamo an' Goliad that I want tew settle," and his eyes glinted savagely.

Long Bill's suggestion was promptly accepted by all, as the wisest thing to do under the circumstances; and half an hour later our friends were accompanying Deaf Smith on his way back to the army of General Houston, who had sent him out the day before to discover if any reinforcements were advancing to the aid of Santa Anna. Now, of course, the scout must hasten back at once to his general to report the advance of General Cos.

Jed Watkins, like the boys, had not been hit by the Mexican bullets in that fatal volley fired at Goliad; and had jumped through the brush, leaped the ditch, and ran across the prairie beyond, making straight for a stream of water that flowed within half a mile of where the massacre occurred. Fortunately he reached the water well ahead of the pursuing Mexicans, and was about to spring into it and swim to the opposite side, when his eyes caught sight of a huge log a couple of rods away, lying across the stream half buried in the water. In another instant he had reached the log and was running across it, when a kind fate caused his foot to slip, and he fell into the water. When he rose to

the surface he was under the log, which, to his surprise, he found was hollow, with its lower side partly worn away by the action of the water, leaving an opening large enough for him to crawl into, a bit of good fortune that he at once proceeded to utilize by crawling up into the log until he was safely hidden within. He heard the feet of the pursuing Mexicans hurrying across the log above his head; but they were unable to discover his hiding-place and he remained there safely concealed until night, when, like the boys, he had fled eastward, and a week before had reached the army of General Houston, where he had been detailed for scouting service under Deaf Smith, Houston's chief of scouts, and had ridden out with him on the present scout.

All this Jed Watkins related to the boys on their way to the Texan army, which they found, about an hour after sundown that night, camped in a little grove of live-oaks on the banks of the Buffalo Bayou, half a mile from its junction with the San Jacinto River.

"Santa Anna has come! Santa Anna has come!" were the words that greeted them from every side as they entered the Texan camp and hurried to General Houston; and everywhere, as they passed through the ranks of the little army, they looked into fiercely exultant faces, for the thought of vengeance for the butcheries of the Alamo and Goliad was hot in every heart, now that at last they had Santa Anna and his army within battle-grip.

General Houston sat on a coil of the artillery rope underneath an old oak tree, heavily festooned with weeping Spanish moss. A camp-fire glowed ruddily a few feet away, and the light, falling on his rugged features, showed plainly the effects of the unremitting toil and the ceaseless anxiety of the past month; but the same indomitable courage and resolution as of old looked out of the piercing eyes. The moment he saw Deaf Smith he sprang to his feet.

“Your report,” and he motioned to the scout to approach.

General Houston’s eyes flashed beneath their frowning brows and his strong mouth closed firmly, when Deaf Smith told him of the approach of General Cos and his five hundred men.

“The Mexicans will outnumber us nearly three to one,” he said; “but the thought of the Alamo, of Goliad, of bleeding Texas, will nerve every Texan with the courage and the strength of a demigod. Still, the men had better not know of the coming of General Cos. Tell no one what you have told me,” and, dismissing the faithful scout, he turned to where Trav and Tom and their fathers stood waiting a little distance away.

“Big Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford and their boys, as I live!” and his somber face lighted up. “This is a splendid sight for my eyes. I was told the Mexicans got you all at Goliad. But here you are, big as life, and prepared to fight the whole

Mexican army," and he gripped each by the hand and shook it warmly.

"But, will there be a battle, General," and Trav looked up eagerly into General Houston's face. "Not that I am anxious to see men killed," he added hastily. "I've seen enough of that to last me a lifetime. But mother and Kitty are with the Mexican army, and if we can beat Santa Anna, then we can rescue them, and—and even up scores with Vasquez," and his young face hardened.

"My boy," and General Houston laid his hand on Trav's shoulder, "I am sorry to hear that your mother and sister are still in the hands of that cowardly Mexican. But," and his face sobered, "to-morrow there will be many long scores settled, and I sincerely hope that yours will be among the number, that to-morrow's setting sun will find your loved ones safely restored to your arms. Believe me," and he turned with a bow to Sam McNelly, "anything that I can do to aid you in their rescue, will be done most willingly. But now I have much to do, and must bid you good night. Make yourselves as comfortable as possible and get all the rest you can, for to-morrow I fear will be a very strenuous day for us all," and General Houston, signifying that the interview was ended, turned to a group of his officers, who were standing near.

Trav and Tom never forgot that night. There were too many things to impress it indelibly on their memories. The camp-fires twinkling ruddily

under the ghostly, moss-shrouded live-oaks; the groups of stern-faced, fierce-eyed men gathered round each glowing bed of coals, examining their weapons and speaking in low tones of the terrible expectancy of the to-morrow; the thought of what that to-morrow might bring to some of them—to all of them; the mysterious something, not seen but felt, that seemed to pervade the very air they breathed with a feeling that by the side of every grim-faced Texan stalked an avenging Nemesis, ready to nerve heart and hand on the morrow—the ghosts of the dead, the dead butchered at the Alamo and at Goliad—these things and feelings burned that night into their memories, as with a red-hot iron.

“I—I know it can’t be true,” Tom said in an awed whisper, as, at last, he stretched himself out on his blanket by the side of Trav. to sleep, if possible, “but somehow, I feel as if the spirits of Davy Crockett and Travis and Bowie and Fannin and the other brave men murdered at the Alamo and at Goliad walked about the camp to-night and stood by the sides of the men,” and he shuddered and snuggled up closer under his blanket to Trav. “I—I heard one of the men say that he knew we would lick the Mexicans to-morrow, because the dead would fight with us.”

“I don’t care who fights with us, if we only lick the Mexicans,” Trav. responded grimly. “I don’t feel as if I could live another day without doing

something to rescue mother and Kitty and even things up with Vasquez. Now I'm going to try to go to sleep," and he rolled over and resolutely closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STRONG SHARP AXES

THE morning of April 21, 1836—a memorable date in Texan history, in the history of America, for it gave to Anglo-American civilization an empire—dawned bright and cloudless. Trav and Tom jumped out of their blankets at the first beat of the three taps on the one drum in the army, with which Houston was wont to sound the reveille, and looked eagerly around. Men were springing up from the ground in every direction—there were no laggards on that morning; and soon the air was a-buzz with the soldiery-hum of an armed camp. The breakfast was hurriedly prepared and eaten; and then began the preparations for the battle all felt to be imminent. Rifles were again carefully examined, powder-horns and bullet-pouches filled, bowie-knives sharpened, and every weapon made ready for instant and effective use. Then the soldiers waited, arms in hands, waited impatiently for the fight to begin.

Trav and Tom were tremendously excited; for they felt that not only their own lives, but also the lives of Mrs. McNelly and Kitty, ay, more, the life of Texas herself, all depended on the outcome of

that day's battle—events sufficiently important to cause any boy with a heart and red blood in him tremendous excitement. The moment their breakfast was eaten they were on their feet, anxious to see everything that was going on.

“Let us go where General Houston is,” Trav whispered to Tom, as the two boys stood side by side staring excitedly around at the hurrying forms of the men. Somehow it did not seem the right thing to do to speak aloud in that surcharged atmosphere of suppressed excitement and suspense. “The men are all ready. Everything depends now on him. If we keep near him we will be sure to know what is going on, and be ready for the fight when it comes.”

“Yes, let us go to Houston,” Tom replied. “Oh, I do hope we will lick the Mexicans! It would be terrible, if—if what happened at the Alamo and at Goliad should again happen here. But it won't. It can't, with General Sam Houston in command.”

The drum had been sounded before the first red of the coming dawn had brightened the east, and the shadows of night still lay under the thick, overhanging branches of the trees as the boys made their way to the general's headquarters—a huge moss-hung oak near the center of the camp. He had no tent, no bed, this heroic general of an army of ragged heroes.

“Sh-h-h-h!” and Trav stopped suddenly, when a rod away from the trunk of the great oak, and

pointed to the ground underneath the tree. "Look there!"

A few feet away the coals of a camp-fire glowed ruddily and shone redly on the form of General Houston, stretched out on his blanket on the ground, his head pillowed on a coil of the rope used in dragging the cannon, his old white hat partly shading his face, and his eyes closed in a deep and peaceful sleep.

For a few minutes the two boys stood staring in wonder at this remarkable scene—the general peacefully sleeping while his army was preparing for desperate battle; and then slowly its deep significance began to dawn upon them.

"He couldn't sleep like that, if he did not feel sure of victory," Tom whispered. "See, he is smiling! I know he is dreaming of victory by the way his face lights up."

"Makes a fellow feel more courageous and confident just to look at him quietly sleeping there," and Trav's eyes shone. "There's not another man in the army could sleep like that, with the thought of what is to come for a bedfellow. Let us go over and sit down on that log and wait until he wakes up," and he indicated a log lying on the ground a couple of rods away.

Nor were the two boys the only ones who seemed to drink in new courage and confidence from the sight of the sleeping general. From the log they saw man after man pause for a moment to look

at the calm, courageous face, and then pass on with a brighter light shining from his own eyes.

General Houston awoke a little after sunrise; and the boys rejoiced to see that the light and the smile did not leave his face, when he passed from dreams to stern reality. His officers immediately gathered around him and reported the condition of their own troops and the position of the enemy.

Trav and Tom, with boyish curiosity, drew near, until they were only a few feet from where General Houston stood. The keen eyes soon saw them, and the lips smiled a welcome. A few minutes later he dismissed the officers and turned to the boys.

"I appoint you my aids-de-camp, for the moment," he said smiling. "Your duty," and he turned to Tom, "will be to go to Colonel Forbes, the Commissary-General, and bid him come to me at once. And you," and his eyes rested on the face of Trav, "will find Deaf Smith, my chief of scouts, and tell him to report to me at once."

Trav and Tom both saluted, as they had seen officers salute their superior, and hurried away, their eyes sparkling with pride. In fifteen minutes Tom was back with Colonel Forbes, and in a few minutes later Trav appeared and reported Deaf Smith on his way to General Houston.

"I want two strong, sharp axes at once, Colonel Forbes," General Houston said. "See that they are here as speedily as possible."

In a few minutes more the two axes were in his possession.

When Deaf Smith appeared Houston handed the axes to him, and bade him conceal them in a safe place near by, where he could lay his hands on them quickly at a moment's notice. Then he ordered him to select a trustworthy companion and to remain within call, in readiness for special service.

Deaf Smith smiled grimly—he knew that his general was considering some desperate venture, but was too wise to ask him what it was—and hurried away to find Denmore Reeves, a fellow scout, and just the man to help him in any venture, however desperate it might be.

Santa Anna's soldiers numbered more than double the army of General Houston, and, at first it was thought that he would attack the Texans; but, when hour after hour passed without any hostile movement coming from the camp of the Mexicans, Houston's men began to grow impatient. They were there to fight; and, if Santa Anna would not come to them, why, then it was self-evident that they must go to Santa Anna. Still, General Houston did not seem to see it that way, and his men began to grumble just a little.

"I do wish someone would do something," Tom said, as he and Trav stood in the outskirts of the little grove of live-oaks in which the Texans were encamped, looking longingly in the direction of the Mexican camp. "It is now nine o'clock, and I don't

believe Santa Anna has any intention of attacking us, and it begins to look as if General Houston would not attack him.”

“I don’t know,” Trav answered, “but I feel quite sure General Houston has something all planned out. After he had given the axes and his orders to Deaf Smith, he called me to him and asked a lot of questions about the army of General Cos. He wanted to know how many men General Cos had, how fast they traveled, and how far from here they were when we left them. And when I had answered him as best I could, he slapped me on the back and said, ‘My boy, my boy, we’ve got the cunning old Mexican fox in a trap, in a trap,’ he repeated triumphantly. ‘But we must wait until all are in before we spring it,’ and then he turned abruptly away from me, his eyes glowing like—like a lion’s—” Trav had never seen a lion, but a lion’s eyes were the only eyes he could think of when he thought of how General Houston looked at that moment—“I don’t know what he meant by the trap, but I feel sure he’s waiting for General Cos to join Santa Anna, so that he can get them all in a bunch; and you know mother and Kitty and Vasquez are with General Cos. I don’t want the fight to begin until General Cos comes,” and the lines on Trav’s face hardened. “If we don’t rescue them now, I am afraid we never can. I—”

“Hark!—Look, look there!” Tom interrupted him, excitedly pointing in the direction of the

Mexican camp. "They are coming! The Mexicans are coming!"

Trav whirled about, and saw coming over a swell of the prairie in the direction of Santa Anna's camp, a large body of men, marching with drums beating and colors flying.

"Yes, it is them! It is the Mexicans!" he cried excitedly, gripping his rifle hard.

"Now, jest hold yer hosses," and Jed Watkins, who had come up on the run at the shout that greeted the appearance of the Mexicans, turned to the excited boys, "an' take another look at them Mexies. They ain't headed our way. Them's General Cos an' his men, or my thinker misses fire, which means jest so much more Mexican meat for our rifles an' knives," and he smiled grimly.

Jed Watkins was right. The body of Mexicans who had so startled Trav and Tom was the army of General Cos, hurrying to join Santa Anna in his camp. General Houston, fearing that these large reinforcements coming to the aid of an enemy already greatly outnumbering his own men might dishearten the Texans, declared that they were not new men, that it was just a Mexican trick, that Santa Anna had caused a large body of his men to march round the hill in sight of the Texans, to make them believe he had received large reinforcements. But Trav and Tom knew that Jed Watkins was right—that now Houston's trap was full; and it is doubtful if one Texan soldier was in the least mislead or

disheartened. Rather their ardor was increased; for this was the General Cos, General Cuss the Texans called him, of the broken parole infamy, and his appearance but added another score to the many scores that the Texans were so anxious to settle.

Trav and Tom, and behind them Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford, watched these men until the last one had passed from sight, with anxiously beating hearts; for somewhere in their midst were Kitty and her mother—and Vasquez. It was only the thought of Vasquez that kept the tears from coming into Trav's eyes, as he thought of his mother and Kitty and of all that they must have suffered during the long days of captivity. Tears? The heat in his blood dried them up before they could get to his eyes.

Yes, the trap of General Houston was now full, but still he made no move to spring it; and the grumbling among the men grew louder and more mutinous. They were like hounds straining at the leash in their eagerness to get at the Mexicans.

At noon the officers, noting the impatience of the men, came to General Houston and asked that he hold a council of war. Houston agreed, and summoned the six field-officers.

“Shall we attack the enemy in his position, or await his attack in ours?” was the question Houston submitted to the council.

“Attack,” promptly answered the two junior officers.

"No, do not attack. Wait to be attacked," advised the four seniors.

"To attack veteran troops with raw militia was a thing unheard of," declared Secretary of War Rusk, one of the four senior officers; "to charge upon a fortified enemy without bayonets in the open prairie had never been known; our position is strong; in it we can whip all Mexico."

"We have but two hundred bayonets in our whole army," asserted another officer. "It would be suicide to charge twice our number armed with bayonets and behind breastworks. Let us wait their attack where we are."

General Houston listened calmly and with an imperturbable countenance to the opinions of his officers; and then, without expressing any opinion of his own, quietly dismissed them, and at once summoned Deaf Smith.

Deaf Smith and his companion, Denmore Reeves, came promptly, their eyes glinting.

"Take the axes and cut down Vince's bridge," Houston commanded in a low voice.

Deaf Smith flashed a look of grim understanding up into his general's face, and seized the axes.

"You must hurry," continued General Houston, the lines of his mouth tightening, as the two men started, the axes over their saddle-bows, "if you would be back in time for what is about to take place."

"This looks a good deal like a fight, General,"

replied Smith, smilingly grimly, and then he and his companion struck spurs and galloped off.

Now let us understand what the cutting down of this Vince's bridge meant to the armies of Santa Anna and General Houston. Both armies, the Mexican as well as the Texan, had entered a *cul-de-sac*, formed by Buffalo Bayou on the north, San Jacinto Bay on the east, marshes and morasses on the south, and Vince's Creek, with its steep almost impassable banks, on the west. There was but one way out of this *cul-de-sac* for either army, and that was by way of Vince's bridge across Vince's Creek some eight miles to the northwest of where the two armies were encamped.

Do you see now the meaning of Houston's order to Deaf Smith and Denmore Reeves to cut down Vince's bridge? It meant, there was to be no retreat, no escape from the victorious army, that he had deliberately determined to conquer or die. The supreme confidence and the sublime courage of the man, thus to destroy his only means of escape when he was about to face a trained and victorious army nearly three times as large and much better armed and equipped than his own! This, then, was the trap General Houston had set for Santa Anna; and, alas, for himself, should he be defeated.

CHAPTER XXXI

REMEMBER THE ALAMO!

DURING all this time the impatience of Trav and Tom and Sam McNelly and Jonas Gifford and all those hardy and determined Texans had been growing with every moment's delay. They could not understand why Houston waited, when all the men at least were eager for the attack; and he did not deign to enlighten them. But at last at half past three in the afternoon they saw orderlies hurrying swiftly from officer to officer; and a moment later came the welcomed command to fall in line. The companies were swiftly marched out of the woods and drawn up in line on the open prairie.

“Look, look!” exclaimed Trav, excitedly, as company after company fell into place. “We are being formed in line of battle!”

“Yes, it sure is the Mexies now,” declared Jed Watkins joyously.

Our friends, including Jed Watkins and Long Bill, were all together in the center division of the little army of Texans, for mutual help in the rescue of Kitty and her mother, should they be so fortunate as to reach the camp of the Mexicans. Their

plan, if the attack should prevail, was to rush in a body to that part of the Mexican camp where the prisoners were most likely to be kept, in order to get to Kitty and Mrs. McNelly, if possible, before Vasquez would have time to do them harm or to force them to fly with him.

Of course Trav and Tom were greatly excited, what boys would not have been under the same circumstances? But both lads kept their excitement under control and did not let it control them, which, as all boys know, is a difficult thing to do; and, when at four o'clock, General Houston himself, mounted on his war-horse, rode down the line, there were not two men in the little army whose hands were steadier than were the hands of Trav and Tom or whose hearts were more eager and anxious for the coming fray.

General Houston rode slowly along the line of waiting soldiers, his keen eyes flashing swiftly from face to face underneath his old white hat thrust well back on his head, and, stopping almost in front of where Trav and Tom stood, wheeled his horse, and, drawing his sword, faced the little army of expectant Texans—a picture that no one then present ever forgot. As fancy imagines one of those splendid hero vikings of old must have looked when about to lead his followers to battle, thus looked Houston, as he wheeled his horse and with drawn sword faced his little army. His great frame, he was over six feet and four inches tall, sat proudly

erect in his saddle, his eyes, always piercing, now seemed to glow with something brighter than fire, and his strong leonine face was fairly aflame with the patriotic determination to make this the victorious end of all the heart-breaking weeks that had gone before. Like a demigod sent to avenge the wrongs of Texas he looked; and something of this Houston must have felt, for it was his voice that sounded the battle-cries, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad! Remember La Bahia!" when at the close of a few words that went to the heart of every man like the blast of a war bugle, he gave the command "Forward!" and the line of stern-faced Texans moved toward the camp of the Mexicans.

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Between the two armies were a couple of small islands of timber, or "motts" as they were called, and, screened by these, Houston had formed his line of battle unperceived by the careless and overconfident Mexicans, who did not dream that the Texans would dare to attack them in their position, which they had already fortified by constructing a breastwork about five feet high out of packs and baggage. Consequently, when the Texan cavalry suddenly dashed out from behind one of the motts, quickly followed by the infantry, they were completely taken by surprise and thrown into the greatest confusion. Indeed, Santa Anna himself and many of his officers were taking their afternoon siesta, and lay asleep in their tents, when

the alarm was given. Exactly what Houston had calculated they would be doing.

“Reckon this’ll be th’ biggest s’prise party them Mexies has had for more’n a dog’s age,” laughed Jed Watkins jubilantly, as the sounds of the confusion and alarm in the Mexican camp reached his ears.

“We’ve got ’em sure frightened. Now’s th’ time tew git after ’em like a house afire. Come on!” called back Long Bill, quickening his pace into a run. “Remember th’ Alamo! Remember Goliad! Let’s wipe th’ critters off th’ earth!”

Trav and Tom could never give a clear account of what followed—no one could who took part in this extraordinary battle. The excitement, the turmoil was too great for only the most important happenings to fix themselves in the memory. They heard General Houston dashing madly up and down behind the lines of charging Texans and shouting at the top of his stentorian voice: “Hold your fire! Hold your fire, boys!” They saw, when the furious lines of on-rushing men were not more than sixty yards from the enemy’s barricade, Deaf Smith, his horse covered with foam, gallop up in front of the plunging men, and heard him yell, “Vince’s bridge has been cut down! Now you must fight for your lives!” and the shout of wild exultation that followed this announcement rang jubilantly in their ears. They knew that the Mexicans fired a scattering volley at them which went

whistling over their heads, that the Texan cannon, the Twin Sisters, knocked a great hole in the flimsy barricade, that once they paused almost within bayonet-thrust and fired a volley point-blank into the huddled, terror-stricken Mexican soldiers—and then they were through the barricade, and clubbed guns and bowie-knives were doing dreadful work all around them, while the air was filled with the avenging yells of, “Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad! Remember La Bahia!” and the piercing cries of the dying Mexicans. It was no longer a battle: it had become a slaughter.

The giant frame and tremendous muscles of Big Sam McNelly carried him through the ranks of the Mexicans, like a lion through a pack of snarling, biting wolves. He had but one object, to get to the tents of the Mexicans as soon as possible; but one thought, the rescue of his wife and daughter; and all who came between him and this went down like ninepins before the blows of his clubbed rifle and the thrusts of his knife. He was the deadly point of an irresistible wedge, with Jonas Gifford and Long Bill and Jed Watkins and Trav and Tom for its body, that pierced its red way straight toward the camp of the Mexicans, where everything was in the wildest turmoil and confusion of tents and baggage and struggling men and horses.

Suddenly Trav and Tom, who were not ten feet behind Sam McNelly, heard him give a great shout of triumph that quickly changed to a cry of horror;

and, almost at the same moment, they saw Vasquez and Big Ike leap out of one of the tents, Mrs. McNelly in the arms of the one and Kitty in the arms of the other, and race madly toward a couple of horses that were frantically struggling to free themselves from their fastening. The horses were some twenty rods from the two men, and the two men were about the same distance from the Texans.

At the shout of Sam McNelly Vasquez looked back and saw who his pursuers were. No need to tell him what his fate would be, if he should fall into their hands. With swift eyes he measured his chances of reaching the horses, burdened with the weight of Kitty, before the Texans could overtake him, and saw that the chances were against his doing so. Without Kitty, he could easily reach the horses and gallop away in safety. But, to drop Kitty would be to drop her into the arms of her father! Was there not another way? Yes; and with a yell of furious exultation, the cowardly villain stopped suddenly, drew his knife from its sheath, hurled the struggling girl to the ground, and raised the knife above her. This way was yet left for his vengeance.

It was the sight of the up-raised knife that had brought the cry of horror to Sam McNelly's lips. His own rifle was empty. He knew that the rifles of the others had all been fired; and only a rifle ball could reach the villain in time to save Kitty.

For an instant Vasquez paused, to drink in the

father's cry of agony, to taste the sweets of his vengeance; and at that fateful moment Jed Watkins threw his long double-barreled rifle to his shoulder and fired. The knife dropped from the shattered, up-raised hand, and Vasquez, with a furious yell of baffled vengeance, darted madly away toward the horses, thinking now only of saving his own miserable life.

"I reckoned it might come in mighty handy tew have a bullet in reserve," Jed Watkins muttered, as he leaped forward again. "Sorry I didn't dare tew risk a shot through th' head; but I'll get th' skunk yet," and he redoubled his efforts to overtake Vasquez.

In the meantime Big Ike had been casting uneasy glances behind him; and, at the sound of the shot and the yell from Vasquez that accompanied it, his courage forsook him, and he hurled Mrs. McNelly violently from his arms and plunged frantically away toward the horses. In a couple of more minutes he had reached the horses, cut the rope that held one of them, threw himself on his back, and was galloping madly away when Long Bill caught sight of a rifle that some Mexican had thrown down in his mad flight, seized it, dropped on one knee, and fired at the fleeing man. Big Ike fell forward on the horse's neck, clung there for a minute, and then tumbled to the ground, his evil career ended.

Vasquez by this time had also reached the horses,

and in another minute he had mounted the remaining one and was riding frantically away, with Jed Watkins still running furiously after him.

For a minute Jed Watkins feared that the villain might escape after all—If only he had another load in his rifle! Then he stopped suddenly; and, with a cry of horror and a swiftly whitening face, stared at the man and the horse struggling in the soft ooze of a morass not ten rods from where he stood. Already the horse had sank to his belly and was going down fast, the thick viscous black mud gripping the man and the beast and pulling them down like a thing of life.

“God A’mighty! God A’mighty!” and Jed Watkins watched with awed face the dreadful scene, powerless to aid had he wished to do so.

In five minutes all was over; and the black mud of one of the deep morasses of San Jacinto Bay had closed forever over the black heart of Andreas Vasquez.

When Jed Watkins returned to his comrades he found Mrs. McNelly and Kitty and Trav all sobbing together in the great arms of Big Sam McNelly.

The battle was won, had been won in fifteen minutes of some of the bloodiest fighting, considering the numbers engaged, that the world has ever seen; and the Texans’ vengeful cries, “Remember

the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" were changed into joyous shouts of victory.

Aye, they had drunk deep, to the very dregs, of their cup of vengeance. They had annihilated an army. Six Hundred and Thirty of the Mexicans had been killed, Two Hundred and Eight wounded, and Seven Hundred and Thirty made prisoners. Nine Hundred English muskets, Three Hundred sabers, Two Hundred pistols, and large quantities of ammunition had fallen into the hands of the victors. Then there were Three Hundred mules, One Hundred horses, much fine clothing, tents and other camp equipage, and Twelve Thousand Dollars in Silver, all gloriously won spoils of war, to be divided among the triumphant Texans.

And all this had cost the Texans but six men killed in the battle and twenty-five wounded!

No wonder the Texans were drunk with glory that night! No wonder they built huge bonfires, and, dressed in the captured finery of the Mexican officers, danced and sang and yelled and hurraed around them, until weariness compelled them to stop!

They had fought and won one of the most remarkable battles in the history of America; and one of the most important, when we consider that it gave to Anglo-American civilization all of that vast territory now included in the great state of Texas; for, when, on the next day, the soldiers of

Houston captured Santa Anna himself, the war was ended and the Spanish-Mexican dominion in Texas forever terminated.

Verily the dead of the Alamo and of Goliad had been avenged!

THE END.

